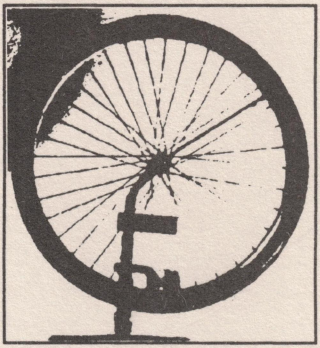
RUBBERNECK 26



Pierre Favre
Rova Saxophone Quartet
Johannes Bergmark
Sakis Papadimitriou
Phil Durrant
Catherine Deneuve

free issue

RUBBERNECK 25

Special Issue

Joe Harriott: Forgotten Father Of European Free Jazz

Edited by **Chris Blackford**

Essays by
Roger Cotterrell
TE Martin
Chris Blackford
Jack Cooke
and
Joe Harriott

The Return of Joe Harriott...

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A collection of critical, biographical and personal writings to celebrate the achievements of the great London-based, Jamaican alto saxophonist **Joe Harriott (1928-1973) and his quintet**, now very much neglected. In the hope that those organisations who have still not reissued their pioneering albums of the 1960s, will be stirred into action...

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"I am not saying that Free Form will replace the music which makes up the general scene. But it will build up quite a following. It's here to stay."
— Joe Harriott

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VOX

Welcome to Issue 26. Anniversaries are on the agenda. Pierre Favre celebrates his 60th birthday with a new solo CD — my favourite improv album of the year. Discover more in a rare British interview with the Swiss master percussionist. Rova, the world's most experimental saxophone quartet, celebrate 20 years activity. Larry Ochs describes their progress. British violinist, Phil Durrant, also celebrates 20 years as a freelance musician and releases his debut solo album. Advance notice, too, of Bruce's Fingers 15th birthday celebrations in April 1998; the British label is planning a special CD to mark the occasion. Swedish performer, Johannes Bergmark, continues the series of personal essays on invented instruments and improvisation. And, Greek improvisor, Sakis Papadimitriou, one of Europe's leading radical pianists (fast approaching 40 years in jazz-related musics) gives his first, and long overdue, interview for a British magazine.

Finally, **Rubberneck** has been doing its own spot of celebrating — a couple or so bottles of the wondrous Fuller's 1845 ale... Believe it or not, the magazine has been listed (under my name as editor/publisher) in the 15th edition of *Who's Who In The World* (by American publisher, Marquis Who's Who). Rather gratifying to know that a publication of this nature keeps an eye on marginalised activities in the small press world. A BIG thank you to contributors, interviewees, advertisers and distributors for helping to make this recognition possible. Keep in touch!

Chris Blackford/December 1997

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"And that's my end, for man can wish no more,
Than so to write, as none e'er writ before."
Rochester (1647-1680)

If you find mistakes in this magazine, please remember that they are there for a purpose. We try to publish something for everyone, and some people are always looking for mistakes.

Portrait of a Percussionist

Pierre Favre at 60

Chris Blackford talks to the Swiss master percussionist about his illustrious career in jazz and improvised music.

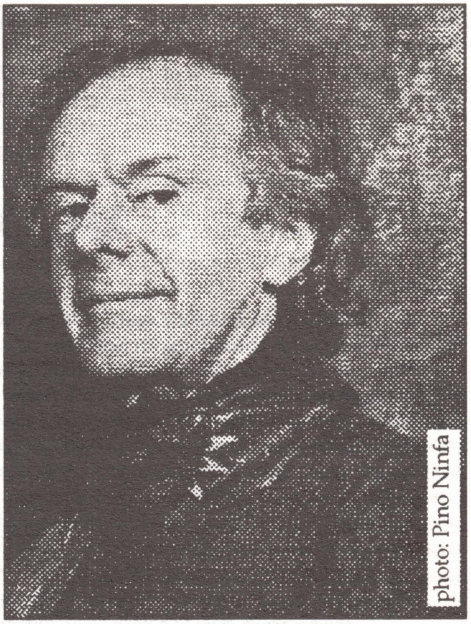

photo: Pino Ninfa

What are your earliest memories of playing jazz?

PF I got started on the drums by my brother. I didn't really want to play them, but he said I had to. Before becoming a professional I gained experience by playing at dances and listening to the radio and records. When I heard Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach and Charlie Parker I was shocked, physically shocked. It was like falling in love. In my early days people said about me, "He can play drums but he is too modern." At this time I was playing in New Orleans and dixieland bands with great musicians like Albert Nicholas, Lil Armstrong and Wild Bill Davison. But my idea was to play more modern things. Even though I had no drum teacher I was playing all the time. I didn't know that you could practice technical things, so my studies were through the ears, just by listening to others. I had a record by Zutty Singleton with a three-minute drum solo which I learned by heart, then played it and people loved it. Also, I was very influenced by Sid Catlett and I had a record by him. A few years later I saw him play with Louis Armstrong.

You became a professional musician at just 17 and later at 19 you became the percussionist for the Basel Radio Orchestra. How did this come about?

PF Well, I was playing in the clubs a lot and people started to get to know me, and one day one of the bandleaders came to my parents and asked if I could join his band professionally. So, I packed my suitcase and drums and went on the road. We were mostly playing for dances — tangos, waltzes and things like that. When I was about 19 somebody at Basel Radio Orchestra asked me to go for an audition. But I couldn't read a note. They liked the way I played and said if I promised to learn how to read quickly I'd get the job. I don't think something like that would be possible these days. Anyway, I learned and stayed with the Orchestra for three years. I also learned how to practice technical things properly.

I met Chet Baker while on tour with the Orchestra and played with him in the 50s in Belgium and I played a lot with George Gruntz. In Paris I played with Dexter Gordon and also with Bud Powell. Playing with Jaki Byard was very

important. He was always talking to me and telling me things. One of the most important experiences with the Orchestra was learning how to drive a big band. As a drummer you have to be able to drive a big band.

During the mid-60s you helped to start the European free jazz/free improvisation scene, but you were keen to oppose the high-energy power-playing of most improvising drummers. Could you explain how you became involved in this scene, and why you continued to explore a more lyrical approach to percussion?

PF I didn't look for free jazz it happened to me. I began by working with Irène (Schweizer) and in a trio with Jiri Mraz and then Peter Kowald, and also a quartet with Evan Parker. I felt something at the tip of my nose, like a new wind. I didn't give it a lot of thought, I just got involved and dropped completely into it. For a certain time I played... probably under the influence of Kowald and Brötzmann... a very high energy kind of playing, a very sweaty type of playing. But finally I relaxed and started to accept the more lyrical way that's inside me. Sound interested me, different blendings of sound. So, after that almost hysterical type of playing, I began to experiment with a softer approach to free jazz. And I was working with Michel Portal in France which had a different kind of approach to free jazz to the German and English approaches.

By the late 60s you were also becoming interested in ethnic musics.

PF Yes, this softer approach led to my interest in ethnic musics — from Africa, India, Brazil, Eskimo music, and so on. I wanted some strong ideas and I found them in these musics. For example, by listening to African music I felt that I was hearing the rhythmical roots of jazz. In India I played for 10 years with the mridangam master, T.V. Gopalkrishnan. From him I learned a lot about the free playing of phrases, and a non-mechanical approach to drumming. I also learned new ideas about energy and sound, different to the idea of energy in the jazz world, where drumming can have a kind of sport aspect, where it becomes a demonstration of muscle. It was a partnership where we influenced each other.

Then in the 70s you turned to a study of classical music. What made you do this?

PF I wanted to hear more, to develop my ears. I realised I had no idea about classical music, so I

photo: Jean-Pierre Larcher

went to a teacher in Switzerland. He was a great man, about 60 years old, and he had been a student of Anton Webern. I learned how to play piano, to compose. For about eight years I studied with him. At this time certain new music groups asked me to work with them, to play music by Ernst Krenek, John Cage. The Swiss composer Hans Ulrich Lehmann composed a piece for me. I didn't become a classical percussionist, but it was interesting to see how things worked in this other area of music, and I hoped that this new dimension would help my playing.

Now I'd like to ask you about specific collaborations. Firstly, your long-time duo with French singer Tamia, which began in 1972. Listening to the ECM CDs ***De La Nuit...Le Jour*** *(1987) and* ***Solitudes*** *(1991), it seems that together you like to create music that is mostly contemplative and restrained in mood with an awareness of silence and space. Your percussion playing here is very delicate, often with bowed cymbals and gongs creating an atmospheric background for*

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Tamia's voice. Could you talk about this duo and say what you think are the special qualities of the music you make together.

PF Well, I love playing with singers because in a way I think of myself as a singer on the drums. In the 60s I was dreaming of playing with Ray Charles, but of course it was impossible. But it's good to dream because in a way you do the thing. Anyway, what was interesting about the duo with Tamia was that we worked out compositions together with the improvisations. It was another kind of energy. Not really the jazz energy. My function in the duo is more like an accompanying chamber orchestra, playing around the singer. As you say, my percussion playing is very delicate, it had to be, for the kind of music we were making, for the way Tamia was singing. I've learned a great deal in this duo.

Another long-time duo partner is Swiss pianist Irène Schweizer who you met in 1967. Irène has described her work with you as having "an intuitive sureness... a broad basis of common musical experiences that are of course useful in our improvisation." I think this "intuitive sureness" is certainly evident on the wonderful Intakt CD, ***Irène Schweizer & Pierre Favre*** *(1990). Perhaps you could talk about how you and Irène work together and say what you think these "common musical experiences" might be.*

PF It's a very intricate thing that we have, but yes for the most part it's based on jazz. When we first started playing together, immediately we played well. We didn't hesitate for a second. Sometimes we'd have a break for a couple of years and then we'd go on stage and it would just happen again. Everything is very rhythmical with Irène, and we both feel the rhythms in the same way. Now that I'm living in Zürich again after 14 years in Paris, we play together more often. When we meet to 'practice', we don't actually practice, we play. We play with just opening our ears. It's not a full playing like on stage. But we're listening, and we

learn how long you can stay on one idea and develop that idea, and not to jump anywhere else before the time has come. So, yes it's a special duo.

Solo playing has been another on-going feature of your career, and your new release for Unit Records, Portrait (1997), is a very fine example of this. Perhaps you could talk about the importance of your solo work.

PF In 1968 I recorded my first solo album and afterwards I started playing solo concerts. This was very important to me, to be responsible for everything, to carry the whole concert on my shoulders. I was able to develop another kind of freedom. I could play differently with the energy. As well as playing the instrument, I could feel the importance of the played silences. During the silence you don't of course play the instrument, but in a way you keep playing — the intensity is always there. So, in solo performances I can experiment with all these things. When I return to group playing after solo work I've found I'm listening more and playing less.

Making **Portrait** was a great experience for me. I recorded it over four or five days. Apart from two or three pieces, like 'Yellow' and 'Student-engespräche', where I used overdubs and worked with a few pre-composed ideas, everything else was completely improvised. I tried to go no further than the first energy, to stop when my thoughts would come into the playing. So, I tried to play just the essential things that came out of me.

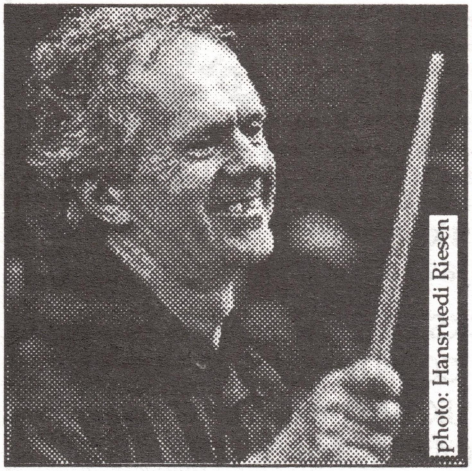
Finally, could you describe your wide-ranging percussive instrumentation and how it's developed over the years?

PF I have an instrumentation that changes all the time. If I have three concerts in a week I will have three different drumsets. On **Portrait** I had a large bass drum, a very low one like a Chinese drum with a shell about two inches thick. I also use a traditional jazz drumset with bass drum, tom-toms and snare drum and cymbals. But the difference is that my snare drum is not in the middle of my playing, but to one side. It plays the role of a tom-tom because I became tired of always reacting on that military drum. I've put it out of the way so that if I really want to hear that snare sound I can look for it. In the middle of my drumset now is a djembe, the African drum. Around the main djembe I have some baby djembes which give this high sound. I also have a range of small Brazilian drums, and a very big frame drum which I play with various kinds of sticks. I have small gongs which I put on the drums so that they resonate with them. My Paiste cymbals are also important because they allow me to play melodies and whole tones. I have giant 10" to 12" crotales which give these long high sounds that can sustain for minutes. I have two beaters on each bass drum, so that with the left foot I can play a hard beat or switch to the other pedal and play a very soft beat. I also have a foot pedal attached to a gong which always surprises me because normally you play a gong using your hands, so by using the foot pedal this wonderful sound seems to appear as if by magic. **R**

Pierre Favre on CD

Sadly, the CD reissue programmes of certain labels have not yet encompassed Pierre Favre's pioneering recordings of the late 60s. Among these are three early European free jazz albums, namely **Santana** (FMP 0630) by the Pierre Favre Trio (with Irène Schweizer and Peter Kowald), recorded in 1968; **European Echoes** (FMP 010) by Manfred Schoof and 15 other musicians, many of whom would later become key figures in the developing European free jazz and free improv scenes, recorded in 1969; and **This Is Free Jazz** (Wergo 80004) by the Pierre Favre Quartet (with Schweizer, Kowald and Evan Parker), recorded in 1969. One hopes it won't be too long before these important recordings are once again in circulation.

Nevertheless, the following CDs give a good impression of the scope of Favre's work during the 80s and 90s. **Arrivederci Le Chouartse** (Hat Hut hat ART CD 6022) is a persuasive example of Favre's fertile longstanding association with French free jazz clarinettist and saxophonist, Michel Portal. This 1980 live recording includes Swiss bassist Léon Francioli. Although Portal creates the melodic focus, Francioli and Favre



avoid an obvious supporting rhythm section role. Favre's delightfully understated, spatial percussives open out the soundfield, allowing the improvised themes to meander and soar with an attractive vigour; on the brooding opening to 'Le Chouartse II' he even uses brushes. Francioli mixes supple, pulse-based energy with darker no-time textures. Three lengthy tracks which infuse the normally stormy free jazz tradition with charm, elegance, and a touch of romance.

Singing Drums (ECM 1274, 1984) by the Pierre Favre Ensemble, comprise a veritable supergroup of percussionists with Paul Motian, Fredy Studer and Nana Vasconcelos — all group-leaders and composers in their own right. The result is never merely a titanic display of virtuosity; rather, a collection of disciplined pieces shaped by Favre's compositional ideas, where individual mastery is at the service of sensitive collective cohesion. 'Rain Forest' is memorable for its airy expanse of cymbals and gongs, and Vasconcelos' whispered vocals; 'Frog Songs', for its interlocking limpid pulses on log drums, crotales and bass drums. A marvellous album of subtle, shimmering tone-colours.

Favre is again in irresistibly superfine form on his two ECM duo albums with French singer Tamia, whose wordless, crystal tone carries an almost 'spiritual' quality — minus the contrived mysticism and anodyne insipidity that plagues new age and ambient musics. Vocal multitracking adds further layers of restrained poignancy, while the top of her extraordinary range achieves a flute-like grace. Moodwise, **De La Nuit...Le Jour** (ECM 1364, 1988) and **Solitudes** (ECM 1446, 1992) traverse similar territory: contemplative, Arcadian, supernatural, though without leading to a sense of repetition or dearth of ideas. If **Solitudes** possibly contains the more memorable melodic material, both are among the most unjustly undersung gems in ECM's catalogue.

As previously mentioned, Favre's duo with pianist Irène Schwiezer is rather special — blessed with an immediate, instinctive rapport. For too long, Schweizer has primarily been regarded as a Taylorite stylist. Apart from the percussiveness of certain manoeuvres, her playing is imbued with a warmth, delicacy and concise, sparkling elegance which I fail to find in Cecil Taylor's influential, yet hugely overpraised work. It's Schweizer's playing that initially draws the attention on **Irène Schweizer & Pierre Favre** (Intakt CD 009, 1990), but Favre responds magnificently to her breath-taking jazz and neo-classical motivic invention, with fizzing cymbalplay and nimble, finely detailed excursions across skins and wood. One of the 90s finest improv duo albums.

Favre's latest group offering, **Window Steps** (ECM 1584), recorded in 1995, presents another highly respected line-up — Wheeler, Ottaviano, Darling and Swallow. Sadly, the music mostly falls prey to that clinical studio sound-aesthetic beloved by ECM engineer Jan Erik Kongshaug, which takes the edge off the vibrancy and attack in the soloing. But taken in small measures one begins to appreciate the beauty of Favre's melodic writing — the stately languor of 'Lea', the skittish 'Cold Nose'. A quintet best heard live, I suspect.

No such problems afflict **Portrait** (Unit Records UTR 5004), Pierre Favre's new solo album. His attention to the subtle nuances of tone-colour and pitch decay is stunning. Other phases are robustly polyrhythmic, sometimes thunderously so. Where 'Painting' is alive with the microtonal density of a tropical rainforest, the reverberant grind and drone of metals on 'Solar Wheel' recall an industrial sawmill. Undoubtedly, a classic album of solo improvisation by one of the finest percussionists of our time. **R**

reviews: **Chris Blackford**

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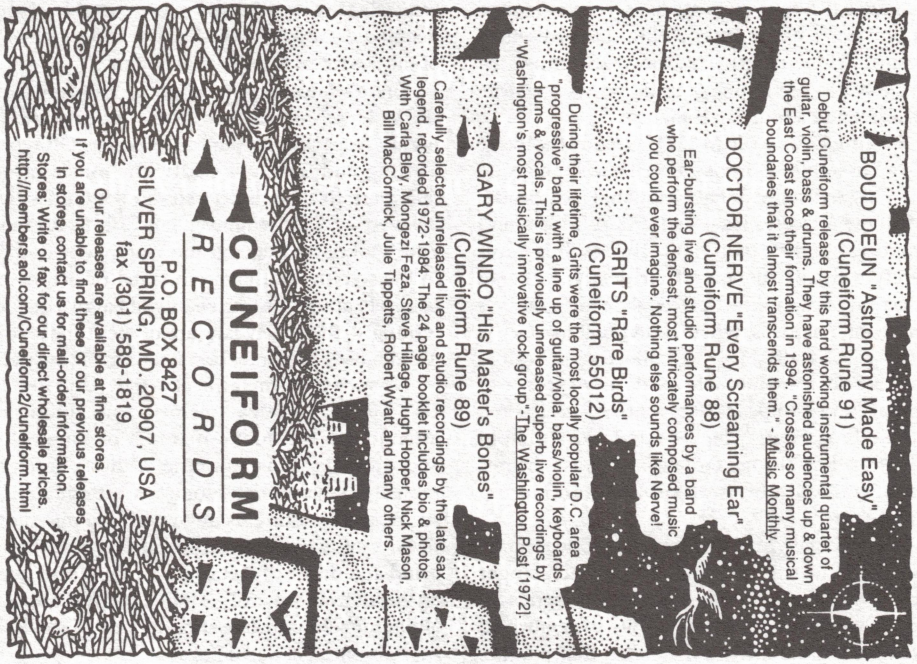
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Magazines...

Avant is a new quarterly journal devoted to modern jazz, free improvisation and contemporary composed musics. It's published by the folks behind the enterprising Future Music Records (FMR) label, and should be available in most high street newsagents in England, if not the UK. Four issues have been published and a very promising start has been made. But the design is too fussy and sometimes makes for a difficult read. Also, the free compilation CD may dissuade potential *readers* who don't like paying that bit extra for an item which may not always interest them. Yet, if the cover price remains below £3.00 this shouldn't be a problem. Contents have included John Law, Tony Oxley, Howard Riley, Hugh Davies, Jan Garbarek, John Surman, Iannis Xenakis, Keith Tippett, Carla Bley, Evan Parker and Butch Morris. Plus CD reviews. **Avant** deserves your support! (£2.99) *Avant, 10 Baddow Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 0DG, England.*

Musicworks (#68, 1997) Interviews are with Sainkho Namchylak (very informative), Ben Neill and David Demnitz; essays/articles on music and spirituality, ethnomusicology, and Australian new music. Well presented, informed writing. Subscribers get relevant CD/MC. *Musicworks, 179 Richmond Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5V 1V3.*

Peace Warriors is a small press magazine concerned with improv and other experimental musics. Latest received issue (#7, July 1997) is a Fred Frith special. Previous issues include Dog Faced Hermans, Marc Ribot, God Is My Co-Pilot, Charlie Haden, Volapük and Michel Doneda. A worthy labour of love. (in French) *Peace Warriors, c/o Théo Jarrier, 4 Impasse Vassou, 75012 Paris, France.*

Perfect Quarterly Review (#4, August 1997) Small press magazine; this issue mostly about Easy Listening. Interviews with Combustible Edison and Summit. Stream-of-consciousness style reviews section covers mostly indie groups, I think. (£1.31 incl. P&P) *Perfect Quarterly Review, c/o Robin Clarke, Old Road South, Kempsey, Worcester WR5 3NJ, England.*

Chris Blackford

Books...

Anthony Braxton: Creative Music Continuums
Alun Ford
Stride Publications (PBK £6.95)

What's that I hear you saying? Not another book on Braxton? Cool it. As much as I'd like to see a book on, say, Roscoe Mitchell, Alun Ford's work is to be judged on its own merits and they are not few. It's not the accumulation of disjointed facts that we are accustomed to see, offering instead a line of reasoning that follows a clearly stated critical perspective. Well researched, if a little dry in its tone, but this can be refreshing in times of colourful prose of dubious value.

In a nutshell, Ford's book can be described as an attempt to clarify the relationship between Braxton's music and the musical continuums usually referred to as 'Western Art Music' and 'Jazz'. Secondly, he proposes a conceptual grid which should give substance to the complex act of music appreciation; this, from the perspective of cultural studies, "concerned with the function of music as a 'social medium'"(page 10).

The main problem is brevity. Chapter One should be at least twice the length; therefore, many points which are not, in themselves, 'wrong' have an ipse dixit-love it or leave it quality that's not so self-evident. When discussing the relationship between Peirce's 'sign' and Saussure's 'signifier' the Corrington quote is pertinent, but debatable that it mirrors the present situation. And Why waste space *still* discussing Attali's and Marsalis' writing.

Narrative strands coalesce quite convincingly in Chapter Four where there's much to inform the Braxton newcomer, and a depth of analysis to delight the more experienced listener. I especially enjoyed the discussion of 'Composition 113', though perhaps Ford reads too much into 'Composition 58'. (*Stride Publications, 11 Sylvan Road, Exeter, Devon EX4 6EW, England*) **R**

Giuseppe Colli

between precision and wildness
Rova Saxophone Quartet

Will Montgomery talks to Rova's **Larry Ochs** about the first 20 years

The Rova Saxophone Quartet came together in the San Francisco Bay Area in autumn 1977, and were originally formed for a one-off local festival performance (a 'free jazz' festival so named because admission was free). Pleased enough with the gig to want to go on, the first solid line-up coalesced when **Andrew Voight** joined **Larry Ochs**, **Bruce Ashley**, and **Jon Raskin**, replacing the original baritone player — the Pete Best of the story. By May 1978, they had been invited to the Moers Festival for 1979, lending a common aim which really established the group. Meanwhile, Ochs had started a record label, Metalanguage, with Henry Kaiser, and the recording possibilities gave an additional stimulus to the quartet's music. In the 20 years of their existence they've become renowned for their imaginative integration of composition and improvisation, their blindness to musical boundaries, and for the diversity of their many collaborators.

What was the thinking behind the original group?

LO There was a very vibrant improvised music scene in San Francisco at that time, but by the late 70s it was beginning to wear a little thin for a lot of us. Mixed in with the good music was an awful lot of self-indulgence and lack of structure without the kind of skill levels prevalent in Europe, so that the so-called free music was often awful. I think Bruce and Jon were both interested in having a group that was more rigorous on the compositional end of things than what they were doing at that time.

How did the group develop from there?

LO When we first started, it's fair to say that everyone in the group was interested in creating a unique group voice. This wasn't so much stated as evident in our praxis. We would spend hours, sometimes going overnight to a warehouse space

in San Francisco, doing free improvisations, analysing them, replaying ideas that were interesting to all of us. And 99 times out of a 100 the interesting ideas were those that surprised us — thus we were weeding out the expected and nurturing the new and unexpected.

"We would spend hours, sometimes going overnight to a warehouse space in San Francisco, doing free improvisations, analysing them, replaying ideas that were interesting to all of us. And 99 times out of a 100 the interesting ideas were those that surprised us — thus we were weeding out the expected and nurturing the new and unexpected."

Another thing we focused on was interesting structures to frame the improvs. We took our inspiration from Braxton and Mitchell and the contemporary composers we were listening to or reading about — for example, Messiaen's writings and the interviews with Stockhausen; we didn't usually borrow ideas so much as get ideas for our music after reading their ideas. Eat, digest, regenerate.

I think that this adamant stance began to be compromised in 83 (I don't mean that to sound negative — maybe there's a better word). By that time we did have a group sound, and we had accomplished a lot already. At the same time, the effect of cutting off the roots was that we were drying up a little, losing momentum. Then the LP **Favorite Street** happened. This was the project involving the four of us in re-arranging Lacy music for our sax quartet. Certainly, anyone familiar with the original pieces would say that we tore them apart and really made the music Rova's. But Lacy's jazzy melodies on 'The Dumps' and 'The Throes' were part of that LP and they were the beginning of our incorporating more traditional material into the music.

By the 84-85 period, which I kind of see as the end of the early period, or perhaps the culmination. We recorded **The Crowd** for Hat Hut in Amiens in summer 85, which was definitely the 'final statement' from the early period. Listening to it now, as much as I'm impressed by the ideas and the writing, it might not make as strong a musical statement as the live **Saxophone Diplomacy** LP recorded for Hat Hut on tour two years earlier in the USSR. Anyway, we had begun working on a series of pieces called 'Sports'. These were pieces with overt rhythmic and melodic concerns and were intended as opening and encore pieces. Not a major thing, but the move towards inclusion of more 'familiar' music was now in place.

In June 1986, the Ganelin Trio came to the US. This was the first tour of a Soviet jazz group in the US. I was in touch with their US management, and as they very much wanted to come to San Francisco to play with Rova, we were able to get them here for expenses plus a nice but affordable fee. The event dovetailed very nicely with Rova's evolution and marked the beginning of a second stage.

Another thing is that we'd collaborated with Kronos in 1984 on a couple of major pieces written by Voigt and myself. A discussion during that collaboration between me and David Harrington led to Rova's going non-profit. It was this very unmusical development that allowed us to apply for money to bring Ganelin in, and that was the real beginning of a series of collaborations with many artists we admired. From 1986-1988 I personally put (too much) energy into organising a slew of collaborations, and Rova was able to present to San Francisco for the first time John Zorn's Cobra, Butch Morris' conduction process, Braxton's 'Composition 129' for sax quintet, a sextet of Rova-Kaiser-Frith, a sextet of Rova plus electronics (Teitelbaum/David Rosenboom), a major work composed by Jon Raskin and myself (mostly by Jon) for sax quartet, and Taiko Dojo (Japanese drum) ensemble. We also were lucky to have a major New York funding plan administered

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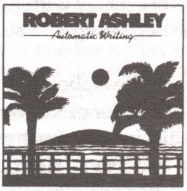

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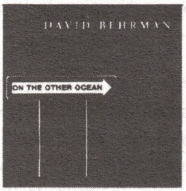

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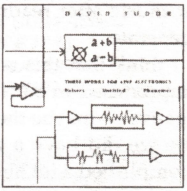

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from 1988 on that gave money to contemporary US composers to write music. Hence all the commissions applied for.

Between the writing from outside sources for quartet and the performing with the likes of Zorn, Frith, Morris, Braxton and Curran, our palette of compositional and improvisational tools widened considerably, and we're still exploring the ramifications of all that activity, which continues to this day.

photo: Dennis Letbetter

In 1988, Andrew Voigt left the group and **Steve Adams** *joined. How did this affect the nature of Rova?*

LO Well, one of the reasons Andrew left was that he really was not particularly interested in the new direction towards collaboration. We inevitably had less time to work on our own material. But sometimes less ends up being more. Steve came in from the more eclectic Your Neighborhood Sax Quartet. He brought his abilities and interest in more jazz-influenced writing, and his skills in reading down music and rehearsal organisation helped when we got into other people's stuff. He also is a much more rhythmically solid player than Andrew. That gave the group two very solid rhythmic players (he and Raskin on baritone, who in the past has given rhythm workshops for non-percussionists, and likes to sit in the train tapping out 7 against nine). Which is to say that there's 'time' and there's 'sense of time'. My 'sense of time' is excellent but my 'time' is less than perfect.

So Steve's entry dovetailed with musical developments. Securer in our own voice, we now felt more comfortable taking that voice and applying it to works by other composers. And our own pieces have in the past eight or 10 years become, I think, more inclusive of the various musical possibilities.

The most recent evolutionary development has been a re-exploration of the free and the loosely-structured improvisational areas. We may be moving towards a time when the freer material is dominant again. I personally feel that this band's freer playing is so strong now, because — on a good night — we all hear each other so well and have such a fluent and deep mutual language that the music absolutely plays out as if composed anyway, but in ways we could never design.

We're analysing the music again and looking for new wrinkles in our improvisational areas, as well as documenting the material so that — if we can arrange it — we can take the music into the public schools and create a mini-curriculum called "improvisation in everyday life".

Can you say a little more about this project?

LO We're just figuring this one out ourselves.

There's an innovator in education here in the States who has been aware of Rova for years. In the past 18 months we have been having monthly discussions with him about our process, and he's intent on designing a course of study with us that will be used as a model for what he calls "cross-curriculum" study, teaching kids how to communicate in a group situation, how to better problem-solve in a fluctuating, unstable environment, how to listen better, and so on. These are all the things that improvisors do in their music, though in our lives we sometimes have the same problems as these kids, don't we?

Playing in the USSR and then collaborating with the Ganelin Trio in the States — it was obviously a major breakthrough given the politics of the time, and it's interesting to hear that it was a musical watershed. Were there any particular cultural or political or musical concerns within Rova that brought this about?

LO On a personal level, Russia had always been a major fascination. When I was in seventh grade, my main 'report' that year was on the USSR. I visited the embassy in New York City and I remember the propaganda magazines and the strange pictures of Communist youth corps types, and so on. I always wanted to go there. Later on the great fiction writers I read from Russia created a mystical image that made the country even more intriguing. When a letter came from the so-called Leningrad New Music Society in 1981, I began immediately looking for ways to make a trip there by the group possible, although I don't think I really thought it could happen. So the first impetus was fantastical more than political or musical.

But there also was — ultimately — a real desire to make a cultural connection. No new music group from the US had ever toured there officially; we brought with us several poets and writers, a music critic, a video crew, a couple of film makers, a dancer. So we were definitely — by 1983 — trying in our little way to offset the classic US/USSR confrontational stance: that was the period when Reagan was calling USSR the 'evil empire'. When I called the US State Dept looking for assistance to go there, the assistant secretary I talked with started calmly explaining why they wouldn't help, but by the end of a three minute statement he was literally furious, yelling into the phone that, "OK, we won't stop you from going but we sure as hell won't help you get there." I didn't call back again. We were also sure that our home phone was eventually being tapped, but who knows... Before we got there, we of course knew about Ganelin and Kuryokhin, but we met so many interesting painters and musicians and writers, amidst a really difficult political climate. The first trip was truly a great one. And we felt that our band of artists really impacted there. To this day collaborations continue amongst artists who met at first on that tour.

"The most recent evolutionary development has been a re-exploration of the free and the loosely-structured improvisational areas. We may be moving towards a time when the freer material is dominant again."

Could you describe some of the various 'gaming' techniques used by Rova, and the thinking behind them?

LO Will — this question is *really* a whole interview all by itself. Let me give you a couple of examples. We just released, on Rastascan, a CD of 'Maintaining The Web Under Less Than Obvious Circumstances' which was recorded six years ago, and is six 'takes' of that piece; a piece originally designed for a quintet of Rova plus Zorn for a concert here in 87, which we continued to perform for four years before recording; it was a piece with hand signals, three dimensional objects, cues, and so on, that cued-in games. We now have a piece called 'Radar' which is similar in that all material is cued-in games, but the games and the procedures are quite different and make for a different result. These two games pieces sandwiched a piece called

'CAGE' that was composed by Steve Adams which took the choice of what one does in the game out of the individual's hands. We all had the option in 'CAGE' to direct the other musicians but not ourselves; and that's another interesting game in and of itself (it has been incorporated now into 'Radar'). I guess I could also say that the games are used to make music. Period. If the music isn't comprehensible without the rules, then it's not worth the effort.

Steve Adams once described the group as poised "between precision and wildness". Is this the basic tension that motors Rova forward?

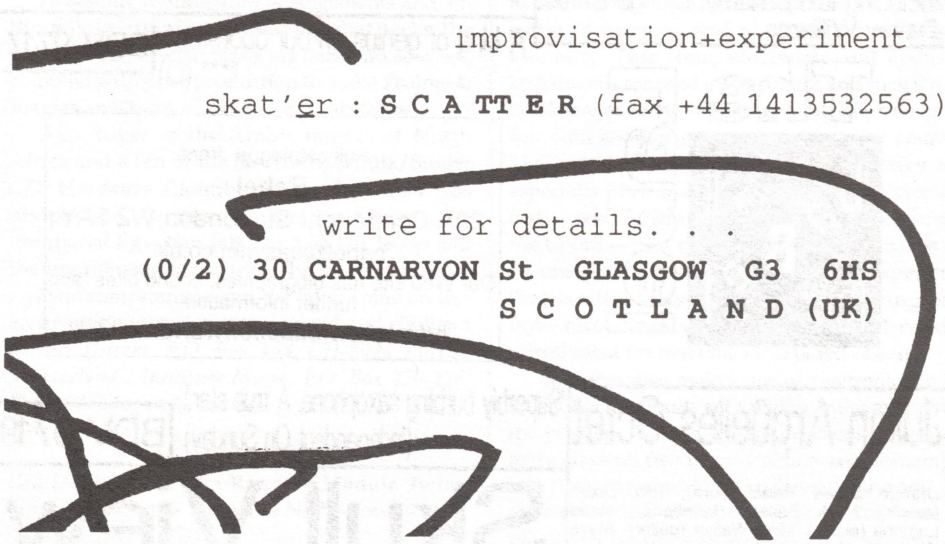
LO I suppose this is true but it's kind of an oversimplification. We always know where we are no matter how wild the music might seem. I also believe at this point that there's no such thing as wild music. We improvise with a field of *intention*. Sometimes we intend to make it seem like we are going to blow up the performance hall. **R**

DISCOGRAPHY

Cinema Rovaté (Metalanguage, 1978); **The Removal Of Secrecy** (Metalanguage, 1979); **Daredevils** (Metalanguage, 1979); **As Was** (Metalanguage, 1981); **Favorite Street** (Black Saint, 1984); **Saxophone Diplomacy** (Hat Hut, 1985); **The Crowd** (Hat Hut, 1986); **Beat Kennel** (Black Saint, 1988); **Long On Logic** (Sound Aspects, 1990); **Maintaining The Web Under Less Than Obvious Circumstances** (Extraplatte, 1990); **This Time We Are Both** (New Albion, 1991); **From The Bureau Of Both** (Black Saint, 1993); **Ptow!!** (Victo, 1995); **The Works Volume 1** (Black Saint, 1995); **The Works Volume 2** (Black Saint, 1997); **Morphological Echo** (Rastascan, 1997)

COLLABORATIVE RECORDINGS

w Anthony Braxton, **The Aggregate** (Sound Aspects, 1987); w Alvin Curran, **Electric Rags II** (New Albion, 1990); w The Ganelin Trio, **San Francisco Holidays** (Leo, 1993); w Terry Riley, **Chanting The Light Of Foresight** (New Albion, 1994); Figure 8 (w 4 other saxophonists), **Pipe Dreams** (Black Saint, 1994); Larry Ochs (w Guy, Ellis, Crispell, Brown, Winant, Adams, Ackley, Raskin), **The Secret Magritte** (Black Saint, 1995); Lawrence Butch Morris, **Testimony: Conduction 11** (New World, 1996; live 1988); **Ascension** (1995 live recording of John Coltrane's 'Ascension' w Spearman, Douglas, Malik, Robinson, Ellis, Brown, Cremaschi) (Black Saint, 1997)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The Colour of Fear

A radiant musical and a jet black thriller. *Catherine Blackford* looks back at the startling early films of screen icon **Catherine Deneuve**

At first sight, there might appear to be little that links the first two films of Catherine Deneuve's career; apart, that is, from the striking, blonde beauty of this now iconic actress herself. Yet, in both Jacques Demy's **The Umbrellas Of Cherbourg** (1964) (*Tartan Video TVT 1278*) and Roman Polanski's **Repulsion** (1965) (*Odyssey Classics ODY 781*) there is a preoccupation with interiors; in particular, the interiors of flats. Also, although both films are utterly different in tone and style, it is Deneuve's character who is trapped or constrained within these interiors, literally and metaphorically.

Demy's **The Umbrellas Of Cherbourg** is an explosion of carefully co-ordinated (techni) colour, where the wallpaper matches dresses, and bicycles match shirts. The staged quality of the film is further enhanced by the unusual choice of an all-sung dialogue, from casual banter in the workplace to heart-felt exchanges of love. This in turn seems to affect the way characters move; they are not just acting but delivering sung performances.

On the surface, it's a fairly lighthearted film about the trials of growing up, of falling in love, and seeking independence from home and family. Genevieve (Deneuve), living and working with her mother in an umbrella shop where — thanks to colour co-ordinated outfits she literally blends into the décor — she meets Guy (Nino Castelnuovo) and falls in love. Though the narrative hints at a greater complexity in the world outside the home (the Algerian War and attitudes to illegitimacy, for example), we are never allowed to become too immersed in the characters' emotions. Demy's stunning use of co-ordinated colour is always the main focus of our attention.

Interiors are used to rather different effect in Roman Polanski's **Repulsion**; filmed in atmospheric black and white. We are slowly drawn into the mind of the central character, Carol — Deneuve on mesmerising form — so that we too begin to see the cracks opening in walls, the images of men appearing in mirrors.

But first we meet her as a quiet, dreamy young Belgian woman working in a beauty salon, follow her cautious moves to and from work through the public male space and gaze of the streets. The nervousness of this woman, a foreigner in London, unused to male company and attention, gradually acquires a disturbing edge when she is left alone in the flat by her sister (Yvonne Furneaux).

Polanski skilfully narrows the focus. The camera closes in, framing head and shoulders, as Carol locks herself in the flat, hypersensitive to every sound and movement of the light. Polanski then treats us to some superb sequences as we see the interior of the flat through Carol's eyes — the intense paranoia of the visuals imaginatively drawing on the surrealist tradition. Only at the very end are we presented with another, sudden and brutally shocking perspective, when we come to realise where we have been taken. **R**

But the instrument has its own will, shows the way and teaches the musician as much as the other way around! The musician becomes like a medium, played by his listening.

Angel Strings

Played By My Instruments
Johannes Bergmark

The conception that music is played on instruments that produce *tones* is an obstacle against the understanding of the basis of music. Classicism has the highest status and is the model for 'proper' music.

Musician and instrument are *bodies in motion with direction, speed, density and pattern of movement* that correspond to thought. Melody, harmony and rhythm correspond to a minor part that pretends to be a major one.

Harmonic vibration produces a *tone*, but periodic vibration is a *special case*. Resonance systems with tones seem to dominate in strength but inharmonic systems, misleadingly called 'percussive' are richer in timbre, however with *shorter* sounds. Microphones open the soundworld where damping is as central as resonance.

In free improvised music the musicians think like composers. The music is made by (often) many equal people. The notion of 'work' is different. The process is *resulting* in an object but doesn't *replace it*. Through creation, many contradictions disappear, but in ordinary classical concerts they reappear. Only inspiration can mend the gap.

The lack of a model often *gives rise to* a special form. Free improvisation abolishes dramatic-functional, hierarchic systems. One has to be able to collectively change direction every second. The dethronization of certain parameters has given priority to others: timbre, dynamics and a quick interchange of *short notes*, which links it naturally to acoustic damping.

This is a way to create *beautiful* music, and a way to *live* in curious, sensitive and creative respect. This music can become a surrealist utopia of free activity with revolutionary potential, in extreme cultivation of *inspiration*. Others call it an anarchist ritual.

All performing arts are ritual. It's important to show what you *desire*, not in the form of a message, but by what you do, and the *images* you create. Not excuse it as symptoms of the times, private or social conflicts. You have to be responsible for what you do to others *even* if it's on stage. You have to *create beauty*, not an idyll; violence and ugliness must be part of the adventure.

Free improvisation is connected to the design of my instruments. I have improvised since 1985, and have built instruments since 1991. My keyboard instruments have been supplemented with the didjeridu, saw, gopychand and lots of objects.

My initial (and continuous) source of inspiration was Hal Rammel, who encouraged me to play

the saw. He is the designer of beautiftul and unique instruments. We've been in contact for 11 years and play together whenever possible.

The visual aspect is always meaningful, but I became aware of it first when I started playing the saw. In acoustic playing, the audience has to be silent, or the instruments strong. I use contact mikes now instead of resonators. The instruments become smaller, more dynamic, can give strength to sounds at the level of insects, but also whisper.

After many instruments, also some traditional ones, I built a one-man band, the **Whalefish,** which collects sound sources I like: wooden sticks, metal rods, loose strings and a wooden tongue with flexible length/pitch. It was built on a piano soundboard which left space for things under development. At present, there are: tunable piano strings, almond grinder, mbira, music box, telephone-, door- and alarm-bells, finger cymbals, spring hacksaw blades, egg slicers, butter ball maker. The moveable tongue is an older instrument, also the **Hedgehog** which has wooden sticks. It can be played sitting, standing or walking. The protruding parts can be unscrewed for packing. A number of tools go with it: bow, plastic forks and spoons, onion-holder and -saw, toy guitar, back scratcher, coffee stirrers, nut grater, moustache brush, shell, ice strainer, holder for mock-flowers, cake cutters, feathers, sand paper, table duster, steel brush, screw, cork, miniature saw, spring, polenta grinder and unidentified things found at flea markets, cooking stores, toy stores, workshops, cafes and on various travels.

I've also collected some wind instruments into the **Monstrosity** to be able to quickly switch between them: melodica, electrical pipes that work as overtone flutes (with a horn mouthpiece, and with a kazoo on the end), whistle, unfolding paper whistles, slide whistle, toy trumpet, mouth siren, arghül, toy pan flute, echo 'microphone', plastic harmonica, all fastened with gaffa tape. They're a complement to my voice.

These combination instruments, voice and saw, are my standard outfit, and are used in most situations and ensembles. But I still keep some old favourites. The **Angel Strings** are two piano wires attached to a high point. At the lower end are hanging stirrups that the musician can stand in. The resonance box is attached to the musician's

JB & Monstrosity

chest. The strings go through loops on the soundboard. So the musician is stuck hanging in the strings, leaning slightly backwards. It's a great sound in these strings, played with wooden beaters, bows or longitudinally with rosined gloves. I made a copy to be played by my duo Acrobatic Music with Terje Mentyjaervi. It's my most theatrical instrument, used in a lot of situations. The idea came from the tension a piano string can take: you could build a piano with a person hanging from each string. Twice the knot has opened; once the thinner 1mm string broke (fortunately the thicker 1.5mm string has never broken) and I found myself playing while rotating around the other string.

The Finger Violin comes from an acoustic idea. I like loose strings without neck or fingerboard so that you can change the tension quickly. My first instrument, the **Butter Bass**, has a string between a neck strap and the butter box that the feet hold. I wanted more strings, and put them on the fingertips; the other end has a wooden piece behind the arm and a wooden board between with a contact mike on it. At the last moment I decided

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Veloncell Marcel

that the form would be of a violin — my first visual consideration.

When you've made an instrument you have to learn how to play it, discover how it can be played with other tools or grips. The combination of a home-made instrument and free improvisation should lead to subjectivity. But the instrument has its own will, shows the way and teaches the musician as much as the other way around! The musician becomes like a medium, played by his listening.

The Finger Violin wanted to be held under the chin like an ordinary violin. The **Metal Harp**, which is metal plates around a tube, wanted to be held in the lap and treated with a hoof scraper (instead of just a bow). With the **Brillolin**, the visual element is dominant; a pair of glassless glasses looked funny when I put strings between them and a miniature violin. **Veloncell Marcel** is a hommage-copy of the bicycle wheel on a stool by Marcel Duchamp. It's not so transportable, but can be wheeled when turned upside down. The dynamo works as a tone generator, and a contact mike in the hub amplifies the sound of the spokes and everything else that is in contact with the instrument, like a balloon, spring muscle trainer, comb, piano hammer, brushes... Contact mikes can turn anything into an instrument.

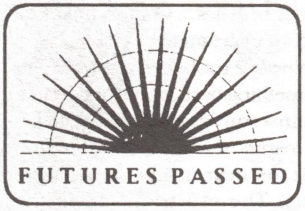
I don't want to *replace* traditional instruments. Why be against something because it's old or new? You have to be against stupidity and commercialization! I want to inspire the making of low-tech 'poor man's music' on instruments, or whatever else is around us. The old tradition is that musicians make their own instruments. Someone once said "tradition of renewal" about African musical history. The petrification of the instruments' development is the divergence!

My music is full of disappointment, hair-raising risk of pretentious trash, and desperate attempts to save the situation. It's frightening to discover that what you know doesn't work a bit. The best music is often made without an audience. Nevertheless, I love to be on stage wondering where this comes from, how exciting it'll be...! **R**

RECORDINGS

Winged Tongues (w Werner, Rammel, Thorne, budgie a.o.), Stockholm 1987; **Where Saws Sing And Fiddles Bloom** (w Hal Rammel), Chicago 1990; **Sistruin**, Stockholm 1990; **The Great Invisible Duo** (w Thomas Magee), Stockholm/Mission Hills, CA 1990; **Muwakkals** (different instruments & mixes), Moss, Norway 1993; **From The Pages Of Experimental Musical Instruments Vol 10**, Nicasio, CA 1995; **Fretlessarmiin** (w Terje Mentyjaervi, Harald Beckstrøm), Moss 1996; **Horror Vacui** (w Christian Werner and Martin Kitchen), Stockhohn 1996; **Birmingham Improv Festival Recordings 96**, TransMuseq Records,1997 CD; w Hal Rammel, Penumbra CD005 and Solo CD in preparation; (photos courtesy **J Bergmark**)

Johannes Bergmark *is a freelance improvisor, instrument inventor, writer, organiser, piano technician and surrealist. He tours Europe and North America and has collaborated with improvisors worldwide, theatre companies, poets and butoh dancers. One of his longstanding partners is Hal Rammel of Wisconsin. Groups in Scandinavia include Hunger (w Bendik Hagerup and Risto Holopainen), Horror Vacui and Fretlessarméén (see Recordings). In April 1997, he organised Oslo Impro, a seven-day festival of free improvisation featuring more than 50 musicians. He lives in Stockholm, Sweden. (bergmark@flashback.se)*



Chris Blackford **rummages through the CD reissues in search of the overlooked and underrated; plus, some recently discovered gems from the archives...**

Emanem's excavation of treasures from the early days of British free improvisation goes from strength to strength with these three **Spontaneous Music Ensemble** CDs, spanning the years 1966-74. Arguably most important are previously unreleased performances from September/October 1966 and March 1967 which comprise **Withdrawal** (*Emanem 4020*), also the title of a 35-minute film (now presumed lost) by American George Paul Solomos, based on the David Chapman book about a drug addict in a mental institution. The four 'Soundtrack' improvisations by Messrs Wheeler, Rutherford, Watts, Parker, Guy (EP's and BG's earliest published recordings to date) and Stevens were to accompany this film; musicians having first familiarised themselves with the book. And there's a slow-motion, hallucinatory quality to the music, arising, in particular, from Guy's deep arco drones and Wheeler's hazy trumpet tone. Watts contributes some fascinating near-ethnic sounds on oboe which become increasingly frenzied as the separate lines work towards occasional tangled crescendos. Stevens' simple, disorientating glockenspiel wouldn't be out of place in a Hitchcockian psychodrama.

The few jazz inflexions that remain are most noticeable in the playing of Wheeler and

John Stevens

Rutherford, the former here emerging as the most persuasive soloist. Interestingly, Parker seems less inhibited when taking over glockenspiel duties on track 5. By 'Sequence 1' of the seven 1967 pieces, Bailey has joined the ensemble, and for 'Sequence 2' Guy has switched briefly to piano, delivering some imaginative internal (on the strings) and external (on the keys) percussive sounds. As one might expect, this later series of pieces, entitled 'Seeing Sounds And Hearing Colours', demonstrates a more ambitious range and control of group dynamics, with large and small gestures confidently balanced and combined, space used to telling effect, and a surer sense of structural development and mood-creation as individuals' non-idiomatic vocabularies become much richer (notably Stevens and Watts) within this collective context. Over the course of about six months, we've heard SME develop into a seminal improvising unit; so much so, that this release now occupies that cornerstone position in British non-idiomatic free improvisation once held by **Karyobin** (1968).

Of course, much important pathbreaking work had been done both in and outside — Amalgam, MIC, Parker/Lytton Duo, etc — SME by the time the fine 1973-4 recordings on **Quintessence 1** (*Emanem 4015*) were made. The previously issued 'Forty Minutes' (ICA Theatre, 1974) featuring Stevens, Parker, Watts, Bailey and visiting US bassist and cellist Kent Carter, displays a marvellous, close-knit group cohesion based on instrumental symmetries. Parker's and Watts' soprano saxophones are often to be heard exploring related areas of the attissimo register, while Bailey's fractured, irascible amplified guitar complements Carter's mellow pizzicato. Remaining tracks consist of three previously unissued 1973 trio performances by Stevens, Watts and Carter; the first and most compelling, 'Rambunctious 1', is busy yet memorably sensitive. Stevens' light and breezy shifts of energy and emphasis on a few small drums and his delicate, quick-witted use of cymbals, are truly

mesmerising. Unfortunately, 'Rambunctious 2' and African-influenced 'Daa-oom' have had their allegedly "less successful" parts lopped off. A somewhat controversial editorial decision.

Quintessence 2 (*Emanem 4016*) is the second half of the aforementioned ICA quintet performance, with previously released 'Thirty-Five Minutes' and 'Ten Minutes' providing further evidence that this was indeed a very special gig. On this disc, two previously unissued tracks feature the Stevens/Watts duo version of SME. 'Corsop', for cornet (Stevens) and soprano sax, has strong dialogic elements with both players listening intently and working beyond mere call and response patterns. Finally, another version of the distinctive 'Daa-oom' hears Stevens' strange African pygmy-influenced vocals fervently echoed by soprano sax — long at 10 minutes, but sufficiently outlandish to hold the attention. As usual, each Emanem disc comes with informative sleeve-notes and good period photos. Spot the Harry Palmer lookalike on **Withdrawal**. (*Emanem, c/o Martin Davidson, 3 Bittacy Rise, Mill Hill NW7 2HH, England*)

If Europe was the place for cutting-edge rock during the 70s (eg, Faust, Henry Cow, King Crimson, Rock In Opposition), US musicians were responsible for some of the most inventive avant-rock of the 80s, notably those interrelated groups from the Los Angeles area: Thinking Plague, 5uu's, Motor Totemist Guild, U Totem and Hail. Thanks to Berlin label, No Man's Land, most of **Motor Totemist Guild**'s work is once again available, this time on two compilation CDs.

Principal composer, James Grigsby, whose cited influences include Zappa, Henry Cow, Ornette Coleman, Ligeti, Varèse, Messiaen and Balinese gamelan, calls MTG's complex eclectic work "electric chamber music".

Archive One (*No Man's Land nml/MTG 1*) couples most of their debut LP **Infra Dig** (1984) with the whole of **Contact With Veils** (1986). Things go playfully wordy on 'Aunt Iodine' with Grigsby's Phil Millerish guitar fuzzed up among the choppy, percussive metres; while 50s, teen-angst vocals are delightfully unhinged by tinkling xylophone, folky accordion and skewed rock 'n' roll guitar on 'Get Angry'. 'The Totem Motorist', unpredictable, fragmentary and loosely song-orientated, drapes Christine Clements' vocals over seemingly unrelated instrumental lines to beautifully beguiling effect. Fugue-like writing introduces 'Cuneiform', which develops into a saturnine improvisation for bass clarinet, muted trumpet and swirling cello, before thematic playing and angular rhythms take over. Structured use of improvisation achieves imaginative textural contrasts, colours and some unexpected linear movement.

Companion disc, **Archive Two** (*No Man's Land nml/MTG 2*), which includes selections from **Shapuno Zoo** (1988), **A Luigi Futi** (1989) and **Klang** (1985), presents a sometimes uneven range of work, where Grigsby's debt to Zappa, in particular, is too apparent for comfort. Although an adept hybrid of rock and classical chamber styles, the structural tendency is often towards the fleet idiomatic changes of **Studio Tan**. Even Eric Strauss' narrative voice(s) on 'Indian Bingo', and the lengthy 'Barbie Variations' with its sub-FZ satirical smut, is possessed by the cartoon spirit of 'Greggery Peccary'. While the studio tape manipulations of 'Omaggio A Futi' offer the most radical soundscapes, an episodic structure finally militates against overall cohesion. Most satisfying are 'Set Of Crayons' where a strummed string figure full of eastern promise and reminiscent of The VU's 'Venus In Furs', is energetically opposed by marching band; and especially 'Prisms Of Ribbon' where once again written material coheres brilliantly with improvisation — Emily Hay (flute) and Lynn Johnston (saxes) on fine form here. Two CDs of ambitious genre-bending music which deserve close attention. Look out for a new 12-piece MTG, soon to record and tour. (*No Man's Land, Gerhard Busse, Straßmannstr 33, D-10249 Berlin, Germany*)

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In 1975, Brain Eno managed to persuade Island Records to invest in a research and development programme concerned with "music from outside the mainstream which had the potential to be absorbed into, modify, and enrich the mainstream." Thus Obscure Records was born, a 10-album series of recordings featuring the work of mainly British experimental composers like Gavin Bryars, Michael Nyman, Christopher Hobbs, John White, Eno, etc.

22 years later, it's interesting to see how ideas in the Obscure series relating to environmental music have been absorbed into the mainstream as ambient music. Eno's **Discreet Music**, (third in the series) an obvious precursor; and now with the reissue of **David Toop**'s and **Max Eastley**'s joint album **New And Rediscovered Musical Instruments** (*Virgin CDOVD 478*) further connections become apparent. Sadly, Virgin have removed the Obscure logo (but retained the sober house style artwork, unlike repackaged versions of Eno, Harold Budd and Penguin Cafe releases), so there's nothing obvious to link this recording to the series for those approaching via Toop's recent ambient/electronica Virgin releases.

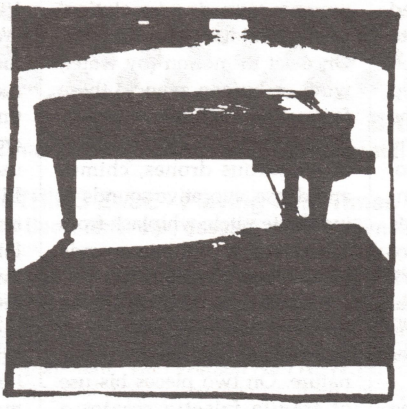
Eastley's stated interest in a synthesis of kinetic art, music and invented musical instruments is demonstrated in four pieces (two recorded at outdoor locations) which feature the hydrophone, metallophone, centriphone and elastic aerophone. While change is certainly apparent, these pieces do not progress towards a 'resolution' as conventionally understood. Once set in motion (by water, wind or human agency) these fascinating instruments largely 'play' themselves, eliciting a host of wondrous drones, chimes and dense, evocative sounds of indefinite pitch; whiplash from the elastic aerophone sounds like a colony of seabirds.

Toop's work involves greater musician activity, but it's of an unassuming, anti-virtuosic nature. On two pieces his use of fragile falsetto creates a restrained, yet unsettling effect; 'The Chairs Story' skilfully blends surreal lyrics and spooky, fairy tale atmospherics. For the longest piece, he is joined by Frank Perry, Paul Burwell, Hugh Davies and Eno. Here, the slow, ceremonial pace of Korean court music provides a framework for the microtonal soundworld of abstract improv. Quietly absorbing music. Hopefully, Virgin will soon reissue the remaining albums from this trailblazing series.

Like SME, **King Crimson** are undergoing a period of critical re-evaluation as live material from the late 60s and early 70s is issued for the first time (officially). **The Night Watch** (*Discipline Global Mobile DGM 9707*), a 2CD set recorded at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, 1973, reminds us that KC were best experienced live, since their studio compositions were often reshaped by live improvisation: 'Fracture' and 'Schizoid Man' being fine examples here.

Free improvisation was also an important aspect of this 1973-74 line-up's (Cross/Fripp/Wetton/Bruford) live work — a rare and audacious thing for a rock group to be doing at this time! Two of the three improvs crafted in Amsterdam were later used on the LP **Starless And Bible Black** (1974); the mostly non-idiomatic 'Starless And Bible Black' is often bleak and traumatic, though Bill Bruford introduces lighter textures with his inspired use of bells and cymbals; in marked contrast, the lyrical 'Trio' involves exquisite melodic invention between bass guitar, violin and Fripp's mellotron. Previously unknown (officially), 'The Fright Watch' is further evidence of their patient, sensitive approach to free improv — from a single shaker to a fog of pounding bass and nightmarish mellotron. (*Discipline Global Mobile, P.O. Box 1533, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 5ER, England*)

The Aerosol Grey Machine (*Fie! FIE9116*) was originally going to be a Peter Hammill solo album, but eventually released under the group name **Van der Graaf Generator**; his and their promising 1969 debut. Essentially, a collection of melodic 'love songs', although the need to explore extended composition is already apparent; 'Afterwards' and 'Ferret & Featherbird' pick of the bunch. Organist, Hugh Banton, the most distinctive musician at this stage, goads an impressively virulent 'Octopus' into troubled waters, with PH's nascent vox hysteria another sign of dark and disputatious things to come. (*Fie!, 1 Walcot Gate, Bath BA1 5UG, UK*) **R**



Chris Blackford talks to **Sakis Papadimitriou**, the Greek improvisor whose internal and external explorations of the piano are among the most mysterious and evocative in contemporary music.

PIANO ORACLE

I understand that you are a self-taught musician. Could you talk about some of your early influences and how you became interested in playing the piano?

SP I am, and I feel like, a self-taught musician. But I think that while there are several ways to be taught (too much discussed and overpracticed) there are also many ways to teach yourself that are not examined enough or not even considered worth doing so.

Musical influences are an obvious place to start, but there are also different kinds of influences which might be even more important than the musical ones. To begin with, I consider as my early musical memories, radio music of the 50s and the music played in my neighbourhood — in dancing clubs or on the streets. Popular songs, jukebox hits, Greek, Italian, French, American, Latin melodies. However, before even imagining becoming a piano player I was more interested in literature. Reading books and starting to write short prose, poems, essays or whatever. This was really my passion, day and night. Anyway, my first jazz albums were by Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Benny Goodman, Dave Brubeck, Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans, and others.

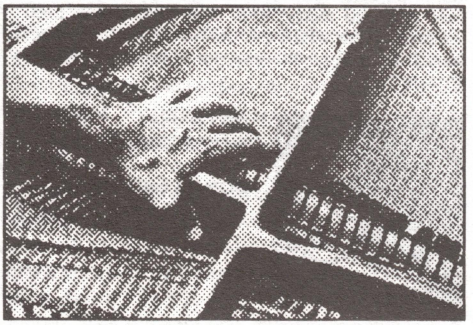
When I was 12 years old, I took accordion lessons. Fortunately, my teacher was one of the few jazz musicians in Thessaloniki who knew exactly how to swing. I admired his playing but the accordion was not an interesting instrument to me, so I stopped practicing. My first piano was a present from my father for passing my law exams at university. A big, black, upright German Seiler with a rich sound. I played it for hours and hours, most of the time playing along with records. It's a great joy to feel that you are participating in the total sound.

Around the same time I was also writing in magazines and publishing books. My *Introduction To Jazz* (1963) was the first book on jazz to be published in Greek. In fact, by the time my first record was released in 1980, 10 books of mine had already been published (on contemporary music, improvisation, the piano, and short stories),

as well as hundreds of articles in literary and music magazines. So, yes, literary influences have been just as important to me as the musical ones.

How did you become interested in experimental music and, in particular, improvised music?

SP It was during the 60s. I was keeping closely in touch with what was happening in jazz, like the Third Stream, free jazz, and world music, etc. Also, to what was happening in so-called contemporary music. Greece was receiving messages from Europe and the States. There were

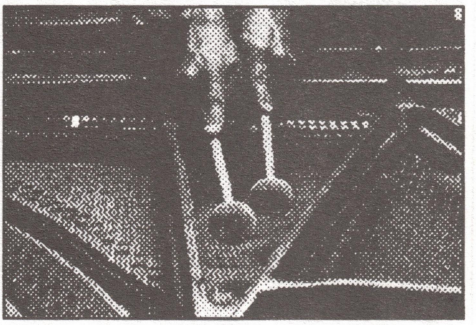


no jazz or free scenes in Greece, and only once or twice a year did we see American or European jazz groups, but there was an active contemporary music scene, well organised and sponsored with frequent performances. Yannis Christou was my favourite composer at the time, because he was preparing his concerts in a ritualistic way that used chance and theatrical elements. There was a mysterious energy in his performances.

During the 70s I attended a lot of festivals in Europe, often as a journalist. I was writing for the only Greek music magazine — now there are more than 10 music magazines. I was the first person to start a regular radio program on jazz in Greece, and I've been working for the Greek State Radio (ERT) since 1975. The programme was dedicated to the European jazz scene. Consequently, I was listening to many of the new groups in the improvised music movement. I was also meeting musicians from France, Germany, England, Italy, Holland, and so on. Of course, the next step was to perform with them in Greece and other countries.

Important elements in your approach to the piano are your use of preparations (preparing the strings, etc) and extended playing techniques on the keyboard and inside the piano. I imagine that the pioneering piano works of Henry Cowell and John Cage may have influenced you to some extent. Could you describe some of your innovative techniques and how you've developed them over the years to create your own distinctive soundworld?

SP Starting to play inside the piano happened when I bought an old (and cheap) German piano which was in very bad condition, made by Berdux,



a factory destroyed during the First World War. This piano had a long history in Thessaloniki. It was used for recitals and concerts, including the city's song festival. Finally, it lost its glamour and was damaged by humidity. It was 80 years old when I bought it. A body of rusted strings and slow moving keys with all these metal and wooden parts co-existing over a magnificent soundboard. You only had to touch the piano inside and push the pedal at the same time and a huge sound was in the air. It was a completely new instrument to me. Since it was in such a bad condition I could try anything without having to worry about damaging it.

At the same time, I had read about Henry Cowell but had not heard his music. I was more interested in John Cage's writing and ideas than in his music, and I was aware of the famous "prepared piano". But I was not thinking of "preparing", because I was in favour of performing. Actually, many of my preparations are made during performance, and I consider them an integral part of the concert. Or I start with a few

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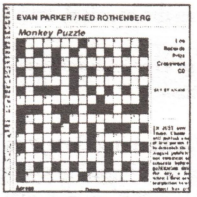

CD LR 247
EVAN PARKER/
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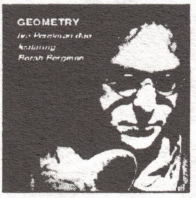
Two great saxophonists unite forces not to blow each other away, but to create something new, original, and unexpected. A studio live recording, with Evan Parker playing soprano and tenor saxophones, and Ned Rothenberg playing bass clarinet and alto saxophone. The bonus is a Leo Records prize winning crossword, the first prize being a CD-R of material not used on "Monkey Puzzle."

CD LR 164
THE GIANCARLO NICOLAI TRIO and JOHN TCHICAI

The main part of this CD was originally released as an LP in 1989. Additional material has been added from another Giancarlo's LP "Gocci". Two John Tchicai's and three Ginacarlo Nicolai's compositions provide an hour of listening time. The great Afro-Danish saxophone player feels himself completely at home with the backup of Thomas Durst (bass), Ueli Muller (drums), and the leader of the trio Giancarlo Nicolai (guitar).



CD LR 248
IVO PERELMAN DUO
featuring
BORAH BERGMAN
GEOMETRY

A monster saxophonist who took the New York scene by storm recorded nine pieces with the pianist whose previous encounters were with Evan Parker, Rosco Mitchell, Thomas Chapin, etc. As Sam Prestianni writes in his liner notes, "...Bergman may be Perelman's ideal pianistic counterpart (next to Matthew Shipp, or perhaps Marilyn Crispell).

CD LR 246
PLUS AND MINUS
Sakis Papadimitriou
Lefteris Agouridakis

The wisard of the "inside-the-piano" playing, Sakis Papadimitriou, with his long-time partner, percussionist and santoor player Lefteris Agouridakis, produce a startling variety of sounds ranging from a sitar-like plucked shimmer, through light skittering, to downright lush, lyrical romanticism, interspersed with rhythmically vigorous passages.

CD LR 249
IVO PERELMAN DUO
featuring
JOE MORRIS
STRINGS

Make no mistake: Ivo Perelman plays cello, which was his first instrument when he started playing and studying music. Sam Prestianni: "Certainly, one of the great duo recordings of the year, at the risk (or for the pleasure) of inciting the ire of the classicists, I'd even place it alongside the efforts of Eddie Lang and Lonnie Johnson, and Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grapelli, as one of the most extraordinary string duos of all-time."

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things inside the piano and then take them away.

One of my favourite positions is to play the keyboard with my right hand (very simple notes and chords), while my left hand is over the strings following the right hand. It is a coordination and an antithesis as well. The two hands work together but each one is leading the other in a different direction. Also, I use the piano-tuning hand device to smoothly hit the strings, sometimes in a melodic way and sometimes just for the sound *per se* and the sliding effects that are produced. I use clothes pins to alter the sound of the single bass strings of the piano which gives a more percussive sound. By incorporating small pieces of wood between the strings I can achieve yet another percussive sound-colour. So, in the left section of the piano I have at least these two methods of playing percussive motifs, rhythmic figures, and so on, while the right hand is free to play either on the keyboard or inside with the tuning device to produce santoor or even dulcimer timbres.

Would you say that the openness of improvised music offers you a greater opportunity to expand the soundworld of the piano, and therefore create a greater sense of mystery and wonder in your music?

SP Well, the openness of improvisation is just that: to follow the sound. That's why it depends a lot on the kind of piano you play, the acoustics of the hall — besides your own feelings, of course. For me, this openness is natural and has to do with our deepest relations to sound-production. But I never forget that the act of improvising is *not* a quality criterion. Not all improvisors can create distinctive soundworlds. Too many are lost here and there, or just go round and round. I admit that for the last eight to 10 years I have not listened intensively to improvised music. I do not have the courage or the interest anymore. Whenever I organise my own performances, I never call them improvised music, jazz or whatever. I have a specific title for a specific performance. This does not mean that improvised parts do not exist inside the whole project, or even jazz intonations.

*On albums like **Piano Oracles, Piano Cellules** and **Plus And Minus**, it's possible to hear elements of traditional Greek and non-Western musics in your improvisations. For example, the sounds you create on the piano suggest instruments like the zither, koto, bouzouki and sitar. Could you talk about the influence Greek and non-Western musics may have had on your work?*

SP It's not easy to pin down how one has been influenced each time in a piece of music. For example, a melodic line perhaps reminds me of the Mediterranean way of singing, or the sound of the piano is harsh and leads to primitive percussion or handmade instruments which are not perfectly pitched. The development of my music does not follow either traditional, non-western musics, or the western classical or jazz forms.

In a piece like 'Pedalling On' from the CD **Plus And Minus** (Leo Records), the idea sprang from my memories of when I was a kid and wanted to learn how to do this pedalling on a bicycle. The idea develops completely in a theatrical way and

goes on until you reach the point of satisfaction, until you take control of your balance on the bicycle. Then the rhythmic figure becomes happy and permanent. There are many examples of mixed influences, musical and non-musical, that I am sure people listening and watching can understand better than me on stage performing.

*Your CD, **The Song Of Lulu**, with singer Georgia Sylleou, is a more conventional work, a collection of songs based on the silent film classic **Pandora's Box**, directed by GW Pabst and starring Louise Brooks. The music draws on the jazz song tradition with aspects of cabaret, even blues. How did these songs evolve from the improvisations you played while the film was being shown?*

SP The CD, **The Song Of Lulu**, is not exactly the music which was played while the film was projected. It was made as a record and not as the music of the actual performance. For example, during the film the title song is actually played more times in different moods and tempi or short versions. Other melodies or riffs go up and down according to the dynamics of the story. On the record I decided to stick to the musical material. The songs did not evolve from pure improvisations. I improvised alone over a month, looking at the video of the film by Pabst. This experience helped me decide on the rhythm and the sequence of the scenes. It took me more than three months to prepare the music for the character of Lulu and her adventures. The music and the songs had to be connected as well, because the movie was going step by step.

I understand you call your silent film improvisations "Music In Situ". Could you explain how you improvise to a silent film, what strategies you employ as you interact with the visual images. For example, do you study the film closely before the performance; do you attempt to create musical motifs for particular characters, or are you more concerned with evoking a complementary sense of mood and atmosphere?

SP I call the music as well as the group or myself, "Music In Situ", which means that the musician or musicians and their music are *there*, on stage, close to the screen. The audience can see them performing and becoming part of the film, even suffering along with the characters and the plot. The film is coming from the past, while the music is flowing right now. The group and the music is connecting the past and present. They are in a continual dialogue with the film and the audience.

It is quite different when I play solo piano than when I play with singer Georgia Sylleou, or with a group of three or four musicians. Of course, when I play solo I feel freer to improvise and this is the main difference. Usually I study the film very carefully and read about the director, the actors and whatever else refers to the period and the specific project. In some cases, time to prepare the performance is limited. For example, **Entr'acte** by René Clair arrived only one day before the performance. I saw it only twice and had to decide how to handle it. The surrealistic nature of the film was such that improvisation was the most suitable.

Another example is **Metropolis** by Fritz Lang. I knew old copies of 70-80 minutes each, but the Film Festival was presenting an enlarged, new copy of 125 minutes without intermission. It was a piano marathon solo in a huge cinema hall without amplification. Fortunately, there was an old Steinway grand, type D, in the cinema. I had only three days to prepare for this new, enlarged copy. We did a non-professional video copy for the rehearsals. I had seen an old copy and studied the plot, so had decided the way I was going to work. It was a mixture of musical motifs for particular characters or machines and specific scenes, and there were improvised parts of moods and energy, especially at the final scene.

In most cases, however, I have a video of the silent film at least two to three months before the performance. In these cases, the improvisations of the first few weeks become actual pieces for the group. The idea is still to interact, to take part, and

to commend. Sometimes, I'll surprise the audience by doing a theatrical passage or by incorporating well known melodies. When we did **Nosferatu** by Murnau, I decided to keep a balance between the terror and the passion of love. It was in 1989-90, and the picture by Coppola was not yet out. The vampire was a man terribly in love, very melancholic and perhaps a little bit... gay in some scenes. For Germaine Dulac's surrealistic **La Coquille Et Le Clergyman**, Georgia Sylleou sung an aria from **Il Travatore** by Verdi and 'Amado Mio' from the film **Gilda**.

How experimental or innovative can you be in your "Music In Situ". Do you feel under pressure to limit the radical aspects of your improvising to suit a film audience which is probably expecting a melodic accompaniment to the film?

SP I do not really mind what the music is called, or even actually is — experimental, improvised, jazz or conventional. In the same project, you may find parts that fit each term. Whether the silent film is avant-garde, or expressionistic, or realistic, or a melodrama or a comedy, I feel that the musician should each time find his approach to the film and decide on the performance without referring to methods or terms. **R**

Photos/images: p. 28 (**Aris Georgiou**), p. 29 (**Aris Georgiou**), p. 31 (**Leo Records**), p. 32 (**Ano Kato Records**)

Sakis Papadimitriou's latest releases are **The Song Of Lulu** (*Ano Kato Records, 19 P.P. Germanou, 54622 Thessaloniki, Greece*) and **Plus And Minus** (*Leo Records, The Cottage, 6 Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA*).

DISCOGRAPHY

w Floros Floridis, **Improvising At Barakos** (Improvisation Series, 1979); solo, **Piano-Contacts** (Improvisation Series, 1980); solo, **Piano Plays** (Leo Records, 1983); solo, **First Move** (Leo Records, 1983); w Günter Sommer, **Orpheus 85** (Praxis, 1987); solo, **Piano Oracles** (Leo Records, 1989); solo, **Piano Cellules** (in Situ, 1990 CD); reissue: **Piano Oracles** (Leo Records, 1994 CD); w Daunik Lazro, Carlos Zingaro, Jean Bolcato, **Periferia** (in Situ, 1995 CD); w Georgia Sylleou, **The Song Of Lulu** (Ano Kato Records, 1996 CD); w Lefteris Agouridakis, **Plus And Minus** (Leo, 1997 CD)

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reasons for now

British violinist **Phil Durrant** describes his wide-ranging activities in improvised and other experimental musics.

1997 marks my 20th year as a freelance musician and also my 40th birthday. When you get to that age there is a certain degree of evaluation. So how do I see myself? Well, as far as I am concerned, I work with 'experimental music' in a number of different contexts. Many people see me as an improvising musician. I feel this is *part* of what I do but does not paint the complete picture. As a musician, I use a number of different sound sources to make my music: acoustic violin; violin/live elctronics; synthesis/sampling/computer music.

methods

I use a number of different methods: free improvisation, conceptual improvisation, composition. I collaborate with musicians, dancers/choreographers, visual artists. My musical vocabulary is derived from contemporary classical, electronica, out rock, and traditional music from the Asian continent. Of course, the method and vocabulary used does depend on who I am working with and the context of the collaboration. At the moment, I am concentrating on collaborations with two musicians, saxophonist John Butcher and analogue synthesizer player Thomas Lehn, and two choreographers, Gill Clarke and Maxine Doyle.

With John Butcher, I am involved in a number of projects: Butcher/Durrant/Russell; Chris Burn Ensemble; Butcher/Durrant/Dorner/Beins; Butcher/Durrant Electronic Processing Duo. The duo with John is a more recent idea. In this context I transform his saxophone playing with my electronics. However, my signal processors 'have their own life'. In other words, I use systems which have their own sound/noise which is changed by a combination of input signal and 'live editing'. The Chris Burn Ensemble uses various methods to make its music. My composition 'SOWARI For Ensemble' is what I would describe as 'conceptual improvisation'. By that, I mean pre-determined limited area(s) of material and a possible pre-determined structure.

I am also working on a number of projects with Thomas Lehn: Durrant/Lehn; Durrant/Lehn/Malfatti; Durrant/Lehn/Gustafsson/Turner; Music In Movement Electronic Orchestra (MIMEO). In the trio with Radu Malfatti (in this context I play acoustic violin) we have an agreed 'concept'. The music in this group uses silence, space and mostly very quiet sounds and textures as our collective material. This produces a music

which does not have conventional climaxes, but nevertheless does create tensions where the individual vocabularies of the musicians overlap and/or collide. The resulting music challenges people's expectations, and for me it's very exciting.

different backgrounds

MIMEO is a large pool of musicians who use various types of electronics. To me, this group reflects a growing trend, where musicians from different backgrounds come together and use improvisation to make music. Pita Rehburg and Christian Fennesz both come from an experimental techno, ambient/electronica background. Keith Rowe brings his vast experience through his work with AMM. Future performances will involve Jim O' Rourke who works in a variety of different contexts.

My work with choreographers Gill Clarke and Maxine Doyle is very important to me at the moment, as the collaborations allow me to show a different side of my music. Gill Clarke works with 'pure dance', that is where the movement and shapes used in her dance and the positions and perspective of the dancers in the performance space, are more important than the narrative (not that there usually is one). Gill works from phrases, which have a number of different elements. The individual elements can be varied and expanded upon. It is interesting to hear Gill and Maxine talk in terms of "retrograde and inversion", terms usually associated with serial music. Gill's use of phrases has made me re-evaluate the way I improvise. I will talk more about this within the context of my solo CD, **Sowari**.

equal collaboration

Maxine Doyle's work is based on narrative. She also uses theatrical elements (including text) in her work. With Maxine I have combined live playing (which is composed) with taped electronic music. For a while (1987-1994), I was involved with the underground techno scene in this country. Here I worked with some interesting musicians including Shut Up And Dance, Fabio and Grooverider, Spooky and Tony Thorpe. My work with Maxine enables me to bring some of the influences and attitudes from that scene into my music. Both Maxine and Gill have a very open and unblinkered attitude to music, which is not the case with many other choreographers. They are also concerned with equal collaboration, thus the music does not merely illustrate the dance but has its own identity much like two or more

musicians improvising.

In 1996, I decided for a number of reasons to record a solo album. In 1997, I would be aged 40 and I thought that it was about time I had a solo release to mark 20 years of activity. Also, I had developed material where the acoustic sound of the violin 'interferes' with the acoustics of the room to produce another audible frequencey (difference tones). For the CD I also decided to organise material into specific pieces. This reflects a method that I often employ in group improvisation. I am concerned that each piece should have its own identity. I therefore limit my material for each improvisation. The pieces on the CD also reflect my various musical experiences and influences.

'303 202 101' explores repeated and filtered harmonics. This piece is influenced by Acid House and the Roland synths that are famous for creating 'that sound' where the top of your head is lifted away! 'SOWARI (acoustic version)' starts out with high sustained harmonics, sometimes

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Wastell and Smith play music which is both patient (certain details are lingered over until they make sense) and seething (there is an edgy, agitated aspect to every note that they play). But above all they achieve a level of dialogue which is compelling at all times. Refraction repays the attention it deserves.
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Rhodri Davies - harp, Simon H. Fell - double bass, Mark Wastell - cello. Live recording: London 1997

IST Anagrams to Avoid Siwa #3 LP £10
Rhodri Davies - harp, Simon H. Fell - double bass, Mark Wastell - cello. Studio recording 1995
String music certainly, but well outside the simple concept of an acoustic chamber music trio, since these musicians explore very unusual areas ..... to be assured this music is not made for those in search of prettiness, but exists to give pleasure to those who wish to hear instrumental combinations and explorations which Market Forces so often would deprive us of. Philippe Renaud - Improjazz

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single pitches, sometimes close clusters which again create additional tones much like ring modulation. I then juxtapose this material with stopped pitches, sometimes in phrases at different speeds, sometimes as chords.

For the second half of the CD, I explore the use of live electronic signal processing to transform the sound of the violin. In some cases this creates a dialogue, in other cases, the violin is submerged and the electronics become the focus. These pieces also reflect my current listening habits. I listen to the music of groups such as Microstoria, Oval and Panasonic. The rhythms of 'Chew 1-3' reflect my Captain Beefheart influence, as well as an interest in 'alien movies', especially when they're eating... Other noticeable influences are Derek Bailey, Henry Kaiser, Steve Lacy, Martin Altena, Alvin Curran and the ever-increasing and important influence of Morton Feldman.

I tend to think of my material in terms of timbre, rhythm, speed, frequency, rather than the organisation of pitch material. However, Feldman's structuring of such material is something I will look into. So, here's to the next 20 years. **R**

Photos: **Harald Mannsberger**

Phil Durrant's **Sowari** is available on Acta (*28 Aylmer Road, London W12 9LQ*). 1998 releases include **Sweethearts In A Drugstore** (w Johannes Bauer, Pat Thomas, Alan Silva, Pere Jorgens, a.o.), and a duo with bassist Alexander Frangenheim.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Bristol Musicians' Co-op, **Unpopular Music** (Zyzzle, 1978); Electronic Music Project, **Electronic Music Project** (Kubu, nda); Planet Oeuf, **Planet Oeuf** (Xopf, 1985); Russell/Durrant/Butcher, **Conceits** (Acta, 1987); Butcher/Durrant/Lovens/Malfatti/Russell, **News From The Shed** (Acta, 1989); Chris Burn Ensemble, **Cultural Baggage** (Acta, 1990 CD); Butcher/Durrant/Russell, **Concert Moves** (Random Acoustics, 1991-92 CD); **Sowari** (solo) (Acta, 1996-97 CD)

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Prime cuts

John Law Trio, Giant Leaves (Autumn Steps)
(FMR CD32-VO896 CD)
John Law, The Hours
(FMR CD41-VO697 CD)
Jon Lloyd Quartet, By Confusion
(Hat Hut hat ART CD6198 CD)

The Law trio (Law: piano; Tim Wells: double bass; Paul Clarvis: drums, percussion) give a delightful, unconventional performance, which flies in the face of FMR's comparisons with Jarrett's Standards Trio, and the classic Bill Evans Trio. The title immediately suggests something clever (we could have worked out the parentheses for ourselves), and indeed those two tunes briefly surface at the beginning and end of two long, subtle tracks, filled with accents and ambiguities. Law is the most convincing exponent of adding colour to the keyboard by fiddling with the bowels of the piano, because he does it in the most unobtrusive manner. This sums up the trio's approach, as they explore the cerebral soundworld found within the cracks between full-blast fortissimo improv, and jazz for-your-dining-pleasure. One's ears are constantly pulled in three directions, as each player vies for attention at being the most enjoyable to listen to.

The Hours, is Law's third solo piano recording for FMR, and like the others it is music based on plainchant, in this case Benedictine monks and the Liber Usualis, from which Law creates eight brief chant expositions, and eight corresponding improvised explorations of these themes. Superficially, the structure echoes the philosophy of 'sounding mathematics' that inspired Bach's interest in fugue and canon. However, Law is less concerned with rigid counterpoint exercise, than using the chants as trampolines for his improvisations, which spring out freely from within their confines; even so, their re-emergence and re-working adds charm. Although it has a folky quality, it is very beautiful.

The Jon Lloyd Quartet comprise Lloyd (alto & soprano), Law (piano), Mark Sanders (drums) and Tim Wells (replacing Paul Rogers) on bass. In the liner notes Brian Morton compares the band's genetics to the classic Coltrane quartet. In terms of how they vibrate the air, both instrumentally and compositionally, the classic Braxton quartet is a better bet (especially on 'Tactility'). Again, Wells sounds as if he would stand still in a storm, and Law seems to be the unifying force. Lloyd plays with fluidity, and his soprano in particular, has a juicy timbre. It includes a take on Dolphy's 'Straight Up And Down'. Some may call it freebop. Recommended. (*FMR Records, 10 Baddow Road, Chelmsford, Essex, CA42 0DG, England / Hat Hut Records, Box 461, 4106 Therwil, Switzerland*)
Mark Greenaway

Muhal Richard Abrams/Marty Ehrlich, The Open Air Meeting (New World Records 80512-2 CD)
John Lindberg, Luminosity
(Music & Arts CD-970 CD)
Hans Reichel & Eroc, The Return Of Honkel Boskopp (Repertoire REP 4688-WY CD)

Expanding the tradition parts 1, 2 & 3. Pianist/composer Muhal Richard Abrams is maybe destined to be forever considered more important as an organizer/mentor than as a musician; a pity, really, since his discography offers an abundance of riches, where modernism and tradition are very subtly mixed. **The Open Air Meeting** presents six live duets with reedman Marty Ehrlich who, as usual, is intelligent, versatile, sympathetic, and whose clarinet work is a real joy. Interested readers will want to refer to two recent Abrams CDs (**Think All, Focus One**, 1995, and **Song For All**, 1997, both on Black Saint) which offer ensemble versions of his two themes performed here — 'Crossbeams' and 'Marching With Honor'.

John Lindberg's solo bass album is really something else and not one only for those who understand words like 'spiccato'. Here, Lindberg (String Trio Of New York, former Braxton sideman, etc) pays homage to his former teacher and almost-forgotten bass player, David Izenzon. Does his

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name ring a bell? Check the two easy-to-find volumes of Ornette Coleman's **At The Golden Circle** on Blue Note, and Coleman's biography by John Litweiler (Quartet Books); easier still, read the informative, perceptive, intellectually stimulating liner notes by Francis Davis. Of course, all this would be useless if the record wasn't as good as it is. Simply put — devastatingly beautiful. I won't even refer to the extended techniques, the arco and pizzicato work, or the stunning humanity of the vocal pieces. Go get this one — and somebody send one copy to Robert Wyatt, who should really cover 'In My Mind's Eye'.

Expanding one's tradition can also mean literally expanding one's work; in the case of Hans Reichel and Eroc, readers can refer to an early 80s LP called **Kino**. The culmination of a long and fruitful relationship, **The Return Of Honkel Boskopp** is absolutely superb, rich with intelligent studio work. Reichel's bittersweet melodies, acoustic/organic and processed sounds, early examples of Reichel's daxophone and a sonic/visual perspective that's rich and stimulating (a nice graphic presentation, too). Kudos to Repertoire for an album guaranteed to take away anybody's Christmas blues. (*New World Records, 701 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10036-1596, USA / Music & Arts, P.O. Box 771, Berkely, CA 94701, USA / Repertoire Records, c/o Milestone Mailorder, Adlerhorst 17, 22459 Hamburg, Germany*)
Giuseppe Colli

Roger Cawkwell, Still Arriving
(Bonobo's Ark Records BARCD001 CD)
Harold Budd, Walk Into My Voice (Materiali Sonori MASO CD 90085 CD)
Aqueous and Roedelius, Meeting The Magus (Hermetic Recordings Herm 4444 CD)
Does the world need three more ambient music CDs? Roger Cawkwell's first solo CD (after years of teaching the likes of Django Bates to do what they do) is a self-produced, entirely self-played affair. As with many such 'solo ensembles' it suffers at times from a density of instrumentation that tends to bury some rather lovely ideas. At times reminiscent of the plangent intricacy of ZNR, at its worst when featuring *that* anonymous sax sound you hear on far too many records, but at its best when he lets the instruments breathe gently and we can hear their quietude. But it's that very quietude that is often the undoing of ambient music, leading us to ignore it utterly. Which is fine if it's **Discreet Music** or **Music For Airports**, not so fine if the style is used to set words that were determinedly expecting to be heard. Such it is with Harold Budd's spoken-word ambient CD of Beat poetry — yes, you heard right. Budd shares the recitations with Jessica Harraker (who also reads her own poetry here — though I'm not sure why) and it's hard to concentrate when the music's convincing you to switch off and enjoy the ride. A mismatch that I doubt the Beats would have had much time for.

One way to short-circuit ambient's limitations is by plugging it into other musical histories. British ambient duo Aqueous' second CD is successful precisely because their guest Roedelius enables them to engage with Cluster's defiantly un-ambient brand of electronic music. Much of this CD encourages active listening and doesn't ask to be ignored; most of all when it employs those lopsided contrapuntal motifs so loved by Cluster, and that often use shimmering, bell-like timbres and wheezy synthetic organs. These provide the most beautiful and engaging music here. A lovely record that sits well with the best of Cluster's important mid-70s work. One 'ambient' recording we do need. (*Bonobo's Ark Records, P.O. Box 12664, London E5 0UQ / Materiali Sonori, via Tre Novembre 2, 52027 San Giovanni Valdarno (AR), Italy / Hermetic Recordings, 11 Berkley Road, London NW1 8XX*)
Chris Atton

L'Ensemble Pierre Cartier, Les Fleurs Du Tapis
(Ambiances Magnétiques AM043 CD)
Joe Fonda/Carlo Morena/Jeff Hirshfield, What We're Hearing (DeWerf WERF 004 CD)
Charles Lloyd, Canto
(ECM 1635 CD)
Pago Libre, Pago Libre
(L+R CDLR 45105 CD)
I have been genuinely surprised by this bundle of releases. By far the most conventional music I have reviewed for **Rubberneck**. Rhythmically and melodically, they are straightforward, if not exactly mainstream. They are also all rather good.

L'Ensemble Pierre Cartier are a quartet of soprano and alto saxes, electric bass and drums.

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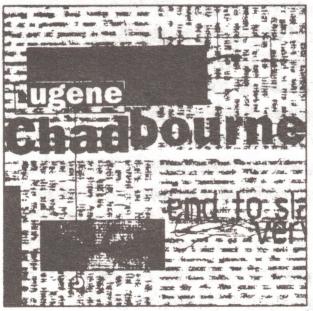

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They were recorded in concert in a Quebec church in 1989. All compositions are by (bassist) Cartier, and display a fine sense of melody as well as an astute ear for arrangement. Frequently, the two saxes weave in and out of each other, playing complementary melodies, producing a mesmerising effect. Both sax players (Jean-Denis Levasseur, soprano; Jean Derome, alto) play at full-tilt when soloing, full of rhythmic drive and verve. There is not a lot of subtlety here, but this is more than compensated for by energy and excitement.

Fonda/Morena/Hirshfield are a piano trio; Morena is the pianist, Fonda the bassist, Hirshfield the drummer. As such, it is wholly conventional; it breaks none of the rules for piano trios. They swing convincingly. The three players work well as a unit, and all solo ably. Morena is an engaging pianist, with a style that is not immediately or obviously derivative.

Charles Lloyd is the best known of this bunch, for historical reasons if not for current form. His fifth ECM album since his comeback has once again brought comparisons with Coltrane. However, these should not be overstated. His tone has always been warmer and more human than Coltrane. And he is not as obsessively exploratory as Coltrane; Lloyd will happily repeat a phrase he likes rather than worrying away at it. While his solos can be strongly reminiscent of ("sheets of sound" era) Coltrane, he has also picked up something of the ECM house style; there are elements of world music and ambient jazz here. The band (Bobo Stenson on piano, Anders Jormin on bass and Billy Hart on drums) complement Lloyd well. Left to their own devices, they produce a spacey, open sound and it is Lloyd's playing which generates most of the heat and interest. Not a classic, as some would claim, but very listenable.

Pago Libre are a quartet with the unusual line-up of violin, French horn, piano/melodica and double bass. Its members hail from Ireland, Austria, Italy and Russia. All are classically trained, and this doubtless contributes to the chamber jazz qualities. This is their second album. They produce very melodic music with a pastoral tranquility. The combination of the four instruments covers the full frequency range, from Tscho Theissing's soaring violin to Daniele Patumi's bass. The contrasting sounds of the instruments create huge differences of mood within a single piece. Although pianist John Wolf Brennan seems to be the driving force behind the group, musically there is no dominant voice or obvious leader. These CDs are about as "far in" as **Rubberneck** gets (*You're not wrong there, John — Ed*). Improv addicts, tread warily! (*Ambiances Magnétiques, 4580 Avenue De Lorimier, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H2H 2B5 / De Werf, Werf Straat 108, 8000 Brugge, Belgium / ECM distributed by New Note: 01689 877884*)

John Eyles

Susanna Ferrar, A Boy Leaves Home
(Mash 004-2 CD)
Philipp Wachsmann, Chathuna
(Bead 03 CD)
Phil Durrant, Sowari
(Acta 10 CD)

Ferrar's disc, recorded mostly in 1994, makes a good companion to those issued on Mash by Sylvia Hallett, who guests here. Ferrar uses studio, live and environmental recordings, plus an 'archive' snippet of her then-small son telling a story. The opening track features one of three sparkling duos between Ferrar's violin and Evan Parker's soprano; Lol Coxhill also pops up on soprano, and gives a moving vocal rendition of 'Shenandoah'. Versions of 'She Moves Through The Fair', 'Women Of Ireland' and a neglected segment of 'Wild Mountain Thyme' may lead some to expect folk/improv crossover, but the 'folk' pieces make wistful, almost ghostly appearances. Not as warm as the Hallett discs, this seems at times too cryptic, too personal, but it's an intriguing experiment.

Wachsmann's new solo disc, a dozen years after his last, derives from concerts at a German synagogue featuring an installation by artist Sarah Eckel, a regular collaborator. As always, his work on violin, viola, electronics and tape is precise with attention to the tiniest detail, and total control of advanced electronic techniques. I'm not always clear how the playing is related to the art (the sleeve photos don't give much help), but the ambience can be striking, as when the synagogue bells are heard on one short track, and the doors are opened, admitting the sounds of the world outside. Overall, I'd have liked a recording with more impact, capturing more of the nuances of

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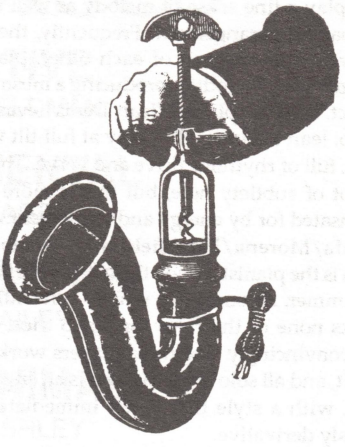

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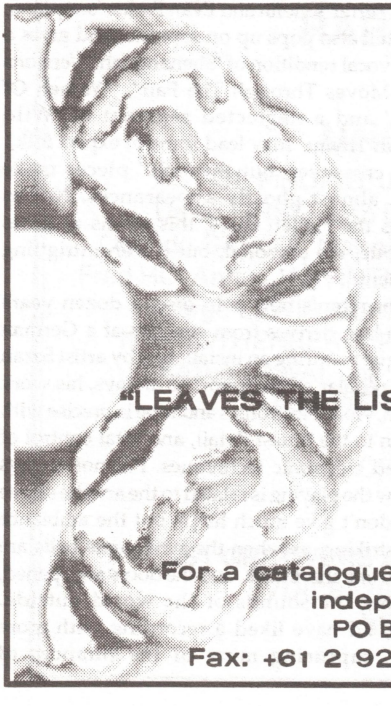

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the playing, but this is an admirable release. Radical Jewish Culture indeed.

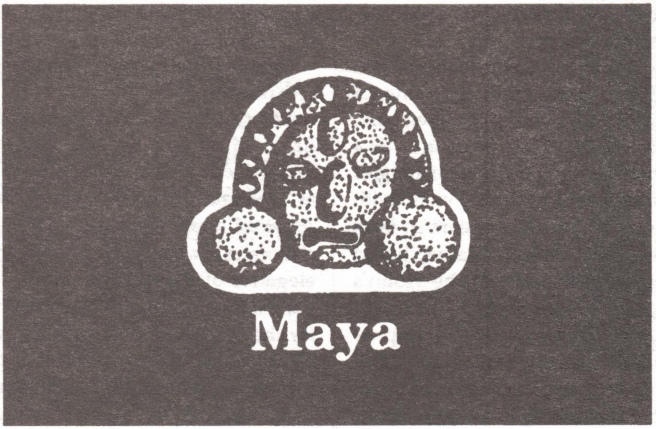
Meanwhile, Durrant gives us his first ever solo recording. I caught a stunning live performance some months ago, and I'm not disappointed here. Based on "organised sound" — structures as a basis for improvisation — the CD intermingles acoustic violin pieces and others using violin with electronics; the long title piece appears in both guises. Three pieces are in fact related, based around various transformations of the violin's sound. All 10 pieces have something distinctive to offer. Those who know Durrant's work in improv and other areas will recall its rhythmic vigour, well captured here. They may also be cheered, as I was, by the statement, "This music is designed to be listened to on speakers not headphones." Damn right, Mr Durrant. Play LOUD, play often. (*Mash Productions, 295 Byron Road, Wealdstone, Middlesex HA3 7TE, England / Bead Records, 3 Beverley Path, Barnes, London SW13 0AL / Acta Records, 28 Aylmer Road, London W12 9LQ*)
Gerard F Tierney

Rudiger Carl, Solo
(FMP CD 86 CD)
Beppe Grifeo, A Quiet Place In The Universe
(Iktius IKT 509 CD)
Matthew Shipp, Before The World
(FMP CD 81 CD)
In the right hands the accordion can be a wonderfully expressive and versatile instrument (in the wrong hands it is aural torture), and from the first reassuring note Rudiger Carl handles it with great ease; his thorough knowledge of the instrument's potential allowing him to create complex cubist or pointillistic improvisations that suddenly cohere into brief, beguiling melodies that grant him a flicker of nostalgic reminiscence. On 'Low Blows' he releases succinct, textured drones against which he unexpectedly begins to whistle 'Singing In The Rain'. Much of the CD was recorded in a disused factory, and his use of reverb in that vast, empty building brings Pauline Oliveros to mind. However, it is on the four tracks where he plays clarinet that he makes most use of the resonant acoustics, layering the sounds that linger with those he is playing or letting the notes settle like dust on the rusting machinery. It is a very appealing CD, revealing a musician capable of combining warmth and adventure.

Beppe Grifeo's solo piano versions of Sun Ra's compositions are, in their way, as eccentric as anything recorded by Saturn's finest. While Sun Ra could infuse a Fletcher Henderson tune with intergalactic weirdness, Grifeo takes pieces such as 'Intergalactic Low Ways' and 'Tapestry From An Asteroid' and finds in them a lyrical core which he elaborates in a straight jazz manner, with the stately elegance of players like Hank Jones or Kenny Barron. There's no doubting his respect and love for the originals (each track listing comes with a complete list of the records it appears on). Apart from a rhythmically lazy left hand, he does play well. After all, an approach which imitated Sun Ra's out of orbit style would be redundant, so this surprising and often charming recording represents a valuable viewpoint.

Before The World was recorded five months before Shipp's first-released solo CD, **Symbol Systems**, on which he played 14 short pieces where, as with three shorter tracks on this FMP release, he worries away at a single topic. But **Before The World** also includes two longer live tracks which allow for a more elaborate, discursive approach and give a clearer idea of Shipp's abundant abilities. His approach to solo playing is undoubtedly informed by Cecil Taylor — dramatic cadences followed by diffuse notes — but he is finding his own fascinating way beyond that monumental influence. (*FMP distributed by Cadillac: 0171 278 7391*)
Declan O' Driscoll

London Jazz Composers Orchestra, Three Pieces For Orchestra (Intakt CD 045 CD)
Aardvark Jazz Orchestra, Psalms & Elegies
(Leo Lab CD 028 CD)
Koch/Schütz/Studer & El Nil Troop, Heavy Cairo Traffic (Intuition INT 3175 2 CD)
One rarely expects inspiration from an institution. At 25 years old the LJCO is definitely an institution but it's music is never less than superb and often, as here, transcendental. Perhaps not surprising since improvisation is high on its agenda and it comprises some of the best players in the field, including Paul Rutherford, Alan Tomlinson, Trevor Watts, Evan Parker, Philipp Wachsmann,



NEW RELEASES

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Howard Riley, Paul Lytton, Barre Phillips, the leader Barry Guy... The list goes on.

The first piece 'Owed To J.S.' is dedicated to the late founding father of British improv, John Stevens. It layers strident ensemble writing against scintillating improvisation from three small sections drawn from those most closely associated with Stevens — Amalgam (represented by Trevor Watts, Rutherford and Guy), the Parker/Lytton Duo and the Howard Riley Trio. This closes with a quiet string section that heralds 'Sleeping Furiously' with guest pianist Marilyn Crispell dispersing notes over floating, Ligeti-like chords as if the stars were crying. It builds from the balladic to the ferocious over three parts with subtle, but often loud, interventions from the orchestra and soloist Paul Dunmall.

The last track has another guest, Maggie Nicols. There can be few people with enough vocal command to front a band like this, but Maggie is definitely one of them. Whether riding the crest of the full orchestra or engaged in the intimate dialogues which lie at the heart of this piece, her mainly wordless vocalese never flags in invention. 'Three Poems For Cecil Taylor' (poems by Marilyn Crispell) rounds off one of the most eventful and fulfilling albums you'll hear this year. There is no jazz orchestra to touch this one.

Academic writing, dull arrangements and, on the whole, uninspired playing that lacks the tightness required to make big band music work, combine with poor production to make **Psalms & Elegies** an album without much substance.

As a lover of the Arabic musics of North Africa and a fan of the last Koch/Schütz/Studer CD, **Hardcore Chambermusic** (Intakt), I was disappointed by this collaboration between the traditional Egyptian folk band El Nil Troop and the improvising Swiss trio. The former make no stylistic compromises and the latter come on like an irritating intrusion into a proud and ebullient music. (*Intakt, P.O. Box 468, CH-8024 Zürich, Switzerland / Intuition Music, P.O. Box 270 126, D-50508 Cologne, Germany*)

Gus Garside

Jim Denley And The Random Module Twins, Sonic Hieroglyphs From The Night-Continent (Split Records 3 CD)

Machine For Making Sense, Talk is Cheap (Split Records 4 CD)

Carlos Bechegas, Projects
Leo Lab CD 032 CD

The possibility of creating new sounds and the manipulation of existing ones that the use of electronics brings, seems irresistible to many improvisors. However, this desire often brings predictable or unimaginative results. In two recordings, multi-instrumentalist Jim Denley tackles these problems head-on.

In the first, he responds to two mini-disc players set on random mode (the "Twins" of the title). Providing this kind of basis to react to is an interesting idea but could potentially lead to music that is rather one-sided, and indeed at times this is the case. In the main, however, Denley avoids this, in part by keeping improvisations short and by the constantly interesting supply of sounds given to the machines. The overall result is a rich abstract soundscape that conjures up a highly personal evocation of aspects of his native land, Australia. Such musical Romanticism is often steeped in sentiment, but Denley stubbornly refuses this route and the result is a thoroughly satisfying experience.

Also featuring Denley, Machine For Making Sense's recording is similarly fascinating. The Romanticism of the first is replaced by a surreal sense of humour and at times a hard-edged atonality. This time, electronic and acoustic instruments are used interactively, and such strong musicians as Stevie Wishart and Rik Rue have great fun with another rich variety of sound sources. The use of vocals is particularly effective and especially Chris Mann's combination of voice and text — somewhere between Cathy Berberian and the Goons — is a delight. This variety makes for an unexpected and totally absorbing experience that is ultimately also a very satisfying one. Both recordings should provide well-needed refreshment for even the most jaded of ears.

Bechegas also makes use of electronics in his music, but the results are a million miles away from the previous two. In sound, his music resembles more classical free improvisation and contemporary notated music. His solo flute playing and trio are represented on the recording. On the latter, he plays synthesizers as well as an electronically

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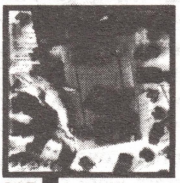

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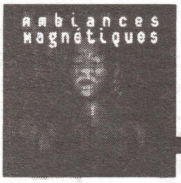

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processed flute. There are many beautiful moments and the soundworld is pleasing — reflecting his South American background. However, the music suffers from the rather dated sound of his electronics. He describes his music as structured improvisation (as opposed to free) and these formal limitations might be the reason why the music often sounds rather stilted. It is, however, an accomplished debut and provides many potentially interesting avenues for exploration. (*Split Records, P.O. Box 445, Potts Point, 2011 Sydney, Australia / Leo Lab, The Cottage, 6 Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA*)
Bruce Coates

Dan Plonsey, Ivory Bill
(Music & Arts CD-982 CD)
Ken Field, Subterranea
(O.O. Discs 0025 CD)
Gary Windo, His Master's Bones
(Cuneiform Rune 89 CD)
Ivory Bill is a solo album with American Dan Plonsey playing soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxophones, both solo and multitracked. He also uses his voice on a few tracks, which can be described as ironic. There are 22 relatively short pieces, many of which have composed themes. The first thing to notice is the sound, which is not supposed to be a true replication of the saxophone, but apparently, "the power and depth of an imaginary ocean." Plonsey would probably be the first to admit that he is not the greatest technician, and he describes his intonational inflections, and near-unison playing as "fuzziness". However, some of his heterophonic compositions are contagious; his solo playing offers the odd surprise, and he adequately conveys his sense of humour.

Ken Field is an award-winning composer of music for animation, film and video, and a member of Birdsongs of the Mesozoic. Two tracks are soundtracks for animated films, almost all the others were recorded solo in underground rooms in New Mexico. The resulting overdubs of Field playing flute, alto, blowing bottles, hand clapping, hitting plastic tubs, juice cans, and a suitcase with sticks, exhibit the gamut of muzak, new age and jazz-lite.

The Gary Windo CD is a big lungful, funky blast of a record. If you have an open mind, it's guaranteed to brighten your day. It is a collection of previously unreleased material from 1971-1984, representing a cross-section of Windo's middle career; originating from a found box of dusty and unlabelled tape recordings, which he was compiling for release before his sudden death in 1992. Windo (tenor, bass clarinet, flute), studied with Warne Marsh and Lennie Tristano, was a member of Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath, led his own band Symbiosis, worked with practically every European and American jazzer (from Elton Dean to John Zorn), and the occasional rocker (Robert Wyatt). The CD includes collaborations with Brotherhood, Mongezi Feza, Carla Bley, and Hugh Hopper among others. Showcasing Windo in a miscellany of musics, instead of diluting his obvious talent, adds to its appeal. Whether playing a ballad, free, fusion, or with an ensemble, his huge hollaring sound is infectious throughout. 17 outstanding tracks, including a rock version of Albert Ayler's 'Ghosts'. Buy! (*O.O. Discs, 261 Groovers Avenue, Black Rock, CT 06605-3452, USA / Cuneiform Records, P.O. Box 8427, Silver Spring, Maryland 20907-8427, USA*)
Mark Greenaway

Misha Mengelberg Trio, No Idea
(DIW Records DIW 619 CD)
Misha Mengelberg, The Root Of The Problem
(Hat Hut hatOLOGY 504 CD)
Mengelberg/Gustafsson/Prins, Live In Holland 97
(X-OR FR5 CD)
Three by Mengelberg. At last he seems to be recording more, so it's happy time for those who have always enjoyed his original piano playing, his composing/improvising and, of course, his humour. Recorded last year, **No Idea** is the ideal companion to **Who's Bridge** (DIW, 1994): there, 11 originals, here one original and seven standards in a 'classic' trio situation. A supporting Greg Cohen on bass and a subtle Joey Baron on drums, playing Blakey to Mengelberg's Monk. The composers are the usual suspects — Nichols, Ellington, Gershwin, Cole Porter, and the 'I'm Getting Sentimental Over You' which Monk recorded. Beautifully — and musically — recorded. In a word — fresh. **The Root Of The Problem** is part of a new jazz series on Hat Hut, hatOLOGY. The sound is very good, but the presentation,

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supposedly ecological, feels a bit stingy to me. Anyway, there are nine live performances from 96; besides Mengelberg we have Steve Potts on saxes, Thomas Heberer on trumpet, Michel Godard on tuba and Achim Kremer on percussion, in various combinations. Individual preferences will dictate one's reactions to the (very varied) performances of this set. I greatly enjoyed everything, but I suspect that for those listeners who are at the improvisation-only end of the spectrum, some improvisations will appear to be too neatly resolved or too 'jazzy'. But then it is in a jazz series...

Meanwhile, in Holland, X-OR releases two piano-sax-percussion trios: one by Luc Houtkamp, Fred Van Hove and Gert-Jan Prins (**Live In Canada 97**, worth investigating) and **Live In Holland 97** where Mengelberg and Prins (on percussion and electronics) are joined by saxophone and flute player Mats Gustafsson in two very long improvisations, plus an original treatment of a Jerome Kern tune. Of course, everybody plays admirably, with a lot of risks taken, with a degree of empathy that never courts predictability. Maybe not for strict jazz lovers. (*DIW Records, 2 - 3 Kanda Awajicho, Chiyoda-Ku, Tokyo 101, Japan / X-OR, P.O. Box 13435, 2501 EK, Den Haag, The Netherlands*)
Giuseppe Colli

Jon Rose, shopping.live@victo
(ReR JR4 CD)
Robert Marcel Lepage, La Plante Humaine
(Ambiances Magnétiques AM042 CD)
Bernard Gunter, Impossible Grey
(Metamkine MKCD023 CD)
Christof Migone, Hole In The Head
(Avatar AVTR 04 CD)
What is it about these large-scale, many-guested satirical pieces that ReR release? I fail to see the joke(s) every time and gaze with awe on those from *The Wire* and *Resonance* who find in them an endless fund of guffaw, "sly wit" (always a favourite phrase) coupled with "devastating technique" (and another). In Jon Rose's **shopping live@victo** I hear only infuriating fragments, people fiddling about with technology, 'clever' collaged/improvised dialogue about consumerism and feel once again the old 'perhaps you had to be there' line coming on. And this, despite the presence of such as Lauren Newton, Chris Cutler and Joëlle Léandre and (inevitably) Otomo Yoshihide. Perhaps you had to be there. I wasn't, needless to say.

Things hot up a little with Lepage's film soundtrack CD, or at least its copious sleevenotes lead me to expect a work of devastating brilliance. But its shuffling between rock and classical passages disappoints: the rock is too anodyne (it's like a Tina Turner backing track); the string passages too slick. These blocks are edited together with a deliberate aural 'channel-changing' device that wears thin after the second time it's deployed. Perhaps you had to be there... It's certainly not a cinema for the ears in the way that Metamkine's series has become. Each new release there demonstrates how you don't even need a film anymore. Their latest mini-CD finds Bernard Gunter doing more with less, as usual. Or, rather, doing less with less, for here is another of his sub-threshold of hearing meisterwerks of intermittent crackling, rumbling and shivering. Glad I wasn't there, it's safer at a distance. Marvellous.

Finally, Christof Migone presents 61 tracks of close-miked vocal explorations in as many minutes, The shortest clocks in at four seconds, recalling Zorn's hardcore excesses applied to the voice, though Migone offers much greater subtlety, variety and humour. An obvious comparison would be Henri Chopin, but whereas he prefers large-scale structures for his compositions, Migone's strength is clearly as a miniaturist, focusing briefly but intently on particular vocal phenomena and semantics. It appears he does this on Canadian radio, too. Precisely why, he doesn't say. You don't need to be there, either. (*Metamkine, 50 Passage des Ateliers, 38140 Rives, France / Avatar distributed by Ambiances Magnétiques*)
Chris Atton

Lol Coxhill & George Haslam, Solos East West
(Slam CD 308 CD)
George Haslam, Argentine Adventures Part 2: New Dimensions (Slam CD 307 CD)
Carlo Actis Dato Quartet, Blue Cairo
(Splasc(H) CD H 454.2 CD)
Have sax will travel? The two Slam releases continue the documentation of George Haslam's foreign sojourns. **Solos East West**, despite the

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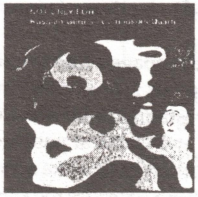
LEO LAB NEW RELEASES



LEO LAB CD 033
RUSSIAN-GERMAN COMPOSERS QUARTET
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Alexej Ajgi, Ivan Sokolov (Moscow, Russia), Dietmar Bonnen, Manfred Niehaus (Cologne, Germany). The four composers use a large variety of instruments: violin, viola, piano, prepared piano, synth, bells, choral samples, voices, accordion, etc. The CD is the result of their collaboration in Cologne and Moscow.

LEO LAB CD 036 **NOT MISSING DRUMS PROJECT**
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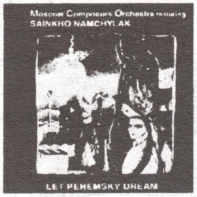
LEO LAB CD 034
JOHN WOLF BRENNAN
MOSCAU-PETUSCHKI FELIX-SZENEN

With this CD John Wolf Brennan fulfils the dream of many musicians. Two pieces are theatre productions staged in Zurich within one year on two very influential literary works by the Russian writer Wenedikt Jerofejew and the Swiss one Robert Walser. Tscho Theissing - violin, Daniele Patumi - bass, Martin Mayes - French horn, John Wolf Brennan - piano, Marion Namestnik - violin, Lars Lindvall - trumpet.

LEO LAB CD 037
SATOKO FUJII ORCHESTRA
SOUTH WIND

The debut CD of Satoko Fujii "How Many" (with Natsuki Tamura) received outstanding reviews. This time it is Satoko's big band consisting of fifteen New York's musicians. The line-up is conventional, but there is nothing conventional or predictable about the music. Satoko belongs to innovators who try to blur the lines between composition and improvisation. Liner notes by Stuart Broomer.



LEO LAB CD 035
MOSCOW COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA
featuring **SAINKHO NAMCHYLAK**
LET PEREMSKY DREAM

This is the third CD by the Moscow Composers Orchestra on Leo Lab. It was recorded at the Unsung Music Festival in London, June 1996, and features the music of the leader Vladimir Miller and the trumpeter Vyacheslav Guyvoronsky. The performance of MCO was a "standing ovation" with the Tuvan throat singer Sainkho Namchylak providing the highlights.

LEO LAB CD 038
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I AM SURPRISED WHILE IT IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING

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credit, features Haslam and Coxhill separately rather than as a duo. Indeed, Haslam was recorded in Ukraine in 1995, while Coxhill was in Stratford East in 1990. The Haslam set, recorded at the Krivoy Rog Jazz Festival, is intriguing. He begins with a free improvisation on baritone sax. A few minutes into it, he quotes a phrase from Ellington's 'It Don't Mean A Thing' and this is warmly applauded by the audience. From that point on, the set becomes a mixture of improvisations and standards. So, we get another Ellington piece, 'I Got It Bad', plus 'Somewhere', 'Softly As In A Morning Sunrise', 'Lulu's Back In Town' and 'Tea For Two', interspersed with improvisations. The blend works well; the standards are well integrated (not thrown in as crowd pleasers) through the dexterity of Haslam's improvisation. Haslam's tone is as commanding and assured as ever. Following this set, Lol Coxhill's long free improvisation on soprano sax comes as a total contrast. The two parts of the CD do not gel, and the only rationale for pairing them seems to be that alone neither would be enough to fill a CD, whereas together they do. Individually, very good, together they make an odd couple.

Another of Haslam's voyages is recorded on **Argentine Adventures Part 2. Part 1** was released in 1994 and has come to be very highly regarded. The music on this follow-up dates from 1994 and 1995. The blend is much as before. Haslam plays with local musicians, performing a mixture of tangos, blues and improvised jazz. The result is varied, vibrant, rhythmically compelling and full of fresh ideas and sounds. This is as much due to the Argentine players as to Haslam. A very happy collaboration.

Carlo Actis Dato Quartet features the two reeds (Dato himself on tenor or baritone sax or bass clarinet, Piero Ponzo on alto sax, clarinet or bass clarinet) plus bass and drums. Dato writes all the material. Their stock-in-trade is fairly short pieces (7 minutes is long) with a robust, knockabout humour. The music has the sense of being rooted in folk melodies, although there is also something of the circus about it, particularly in its dramatic changes of mood and tempo. The two reeds work well together, sometimes playing in unison, at other times interweaving. Given the variety of instruments that Dato and Ponzo can play, there are plenty of possible combinations, and these are effectively exploited. This is music full of fun and vitality, with never a dull moment.
(Slam, 3 Thesiger Road, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 2DX, England / Splasc(H), via Roma 11, 21051 Arcisate, Italy)
John Eyles

Arthur Jarvinen, Edible Black Ink
(O.O. Discs 0028 CD)
Stuart Saunders Smith, Wind In The Channel
(O.O. Discs 0031 CD)
Accroche Note, Live In Berlin
(FMP CD 83 CD)
The continued existence of innovative and impressive composers is beyond doubt; but equally certain is the exasperating sterility of much of the music which, because it is notated, gains an immediate respect denied to improvised music, while succeeding only in retarding the creativity of musicians. The work of Arthur Jarvinen is a perfect example. His inert, rhythmically monotonous compositions have, according to Kyle Gann's liner note, "fused the subtlety and complexity of 12-tone music with the clarity and melodicism of minimalist music." Sadly, instead, it lacks the invigorating intricacy of the former and the mantra-like quality of the latter. He also, let me warn you, describes this leaden music as "wacky".

Wind In The Channel is somewhat better but Stuart Saunders Smith's compositions for a variety of solo instruments — oboe, piano, tenor recorder and speaking voice — uniformly lack punctum. If, as Christopher Shultis writes in his liner note, "the score fails to communicate fully... the performer in all cases is put in a place of uncertainty; the same place the composer lived while writing it," then the implication is that the process — the improvisations — which led to the freezing of these compositions, must have been a good deal more interesting than the end result.

In contrast, Accroche Note are five musicians who bring the liberating openness of improvised music to every piece they play, including compositions by Cage and Stockhausen. The language of Eric Dolphy's sublime **Out To Lunch** would appear to be one important point of departure, as Armand Angster's bass clarinet gutturally rasps and croaks against the clamorous, reverberant

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CORTO NANCY

vibes of Emmanuel Sejourne. Equally absorbing is the vocal technique of Françoise Kubler, whose voice, like the group as a whole, displays a rich flexibility. Their music locates the essential reciprocity that flows between two types of music and leaves no trace of a seam. Their version of Stockhausen's 'Tierkreis' is reformed and transformed, while 'Pico' refloats and relocates Dolphy's soundworld. It all works and is utterly natural.

Declan O' Driscoll

Hugh Davies, Interplay
(FMR CD39-V0697 CD)
Gushwachs, Gushwachs
(Bead 002 CD)
Instrumental Panel, The Green Fire Bull
(Ammediate Records 110.01 CD)

It's been a long time since Hugh Davies had an album to his name, so this is a welcome release. Davies has worked as an improvisor (including being a member of the Music Improvisation Company along with Evan Parker, Derek Bailey and Jamie Muir in the late 60s), a composer/performer (he was Stockhausen's assistant for several years and performed on many of his pieces) and an instrument inventor/builder. This album has him as improvisor/inventor in trios with guitarist John Russell and percussionist Roger Turner (4 tracks), and a track each of duos with trombonist Hilary Jeffery and instrument makers Max Eastley and Hans-Karsten Raecke.

Throughout you are gripped by the detail, the succession of small events by which form is conceived. Concentration is focused by the quality of the production, the size of the ensembles, the novelty of new sounds — invented instruments and unorthodox techniques on the conventional instruments — and the quality of all the players. But mostly it is the essence of the music itself that draws you into its web — the vibrant filigree of shuffle, scrape and slide that underlies our fragile existence. Music is rarely this good.

It's perhaps ironic that it is the addition of electronics in electroacoustic music that has helped us rediscover *hearing* in a noisy world. As with invented instruments, sound sources are no longer obvious and traditional musical relationships (harmony, the logic of serialism, etc) dissolve — we are drawn to listen. For composers like John Cage this process of rediscovery was their mission; for improvisors it is a vital component of the creation and reception of their music.

Guswachs extends the Swedish trio Gush (Sten Sandell on keyboards, Raymond Strid on electroacoustic percussion and Mats Gustafsson on reeds) with the addition of the master electroacoustic improvisor, Phil Wachsmann (violin). Together they have produced a quiet, sensitive and engaging album with lots of space. It asks you to listen and only works if you can.

It is with similar intent that the American quartet, Instrumental Panel, approach their craft. Also quiet but somehow noisier — synchronicity replaces dialogue, accident replaces design and collaboration. Perhaps the most humane and accepting of these three CDs, and perhaps the least challenging. (*Bead Records, 3 Beverley Path, London SW13 0AL / Ammediate, PO Box 1511, Boulder, Colorado 80306, USA*)

Gus Garside

Feet Music, Assertions & Sketches
(Chroma Independent Media CIM 53095 CD)
Scott Rosenberg, Are
(Super J Recordings SJ-081996 CD)
Doneda/Papaux/Zbinden, Instant Songs
(For 4 Ears Records CD 821 CD)

Combining improvisation and composition can be a dangerous game. Invariably one or the other element comes off worst, and in the most extreme cases both are emasculated. The latter scenario is unfortunately largely true of Feet Music. The improvisations are unfocused, the compositions trite. The music doesn't seem to know what it is about and there is no real focus or purpose on display. This is a shame as the musicians are obviously very talented but seem somehow to have lost their way by trying to be too clever. There are occasional moments when one's hopes are raised, but these are usually dashed again.

In stark contrast, the balance is struck to perfection by Scott Rosenberg. Improvisation is used to enhance the written material and it is often difficult to hear the point at which the musicians have left the written materials — such is their consummate skill and discipline. The

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mixture of two separate ensembles, Rosenberg's solo saxophone and piano compositions make for a gratifyingly varied selection. The saxophone solo 'Stockton Tunnel' has interesting parallels with Lol Coxhill's busking work (see the documentary **Frog Dance**). The saxophonist's use of the tunnel's acoustics, combined with the sound of passing traffic is exquisitely judged. There are some strong individual performances, most notably from bassist Matt Ingalls and percussionist Gino Robair (the latter, for me the highlight of this year's LMC Festival). It is, however, the distinctive quality of Rosenberg's compositions and inventive improvising that make the recording such a delight.

Saxophonist, Michel Doneda, is currently one of the most exciting European improvisors. This recording is, however, somewhat uneven. The quality of the ensemble improvising is without doubt excellent, but when Doneda shifts to using his voice to produce the 'instant songs' of the title, things come a little unstuck. Initially, the use of voice is interesting but his range is limited and for the majority of the time he virtually shouts. This tends to become increasingly irritating and one finds oneself longing for the return of instrumental passages. There is some exciting guitar playing from Gérald Zbinden and Marcel Papau's highly rhythmic drums are superb. Not one of Doneda's finest hours, but nevertheless some great contributions from all concerned. (*Chroma Independent Media distributed by North Country, Cadence Building, Redwood, NY 13679, USA / Super J Recordings, 188 Shipley Street, San Francisco, CA 94107, USA / For 4 Ears Records, Steinechtweg 16, CH-4452 Itingen, Switzerland*)

Bruce Coates

Various Artists, Lives: A Pointless Night Out (Without Fear Recordings 0001 CD)
Various Artists, Sound Gallery Vol 1 (Discus 9 CD)
October Meeting 1991, Anatomy Of A Meeting (Bimhuis 004 CD)

Lives documents a collaboration between an Ohio music label and an experimental music concert series. The Umbilical Trio (sax, bass, drums) provide manic free jazz with impacted tight themes; the Billy Tipton Memorial Saxophone Quartet (an all-female group) play one track with an Eastern melody and plenty of percussion, another with a funky baritone. The New Family (violin, sax, percussion) from New York, play impressive improv with the spirit of 60s free jazz; the exciting Siamese Twins feature Chris Strollo playing electroacoustic sax (which creates dissonant polyphonic effects and phantom guitars) and the pan-rhythmic Scott Davis on drums. The Pointless Orchestra perform improvised avant-garde world music: one piece being for koto, kulentang, tuba, waterphone, double bass and English horn, and sounding like an Oriental version of Company. The last act is electronic sound sculptor John Hajeski. All in all, a rewarding listen. Wish I had been there.

Sound Gallery Vol 1 is a collection of mostly electroacoustic music by five composers. Michael Szpakowski starts off with three sparse, minimalist solo piano pieces, which are compelling in their simplicity, its production having an underwater, dream-like quality, with lots of space for the harmonics to sound via osmosis. Martin Archer treats his piano to synthesised and electronic manipulation in a thoughtful, understated way; Tim Risher's 'In Paradiso' is an enchanting soundscape alchemised from very simple elements (voice and keyboards), and he creates delicate, futuristic dance music on 'The Only Reality Is In Your Head (Part III)'; Nik Bizzell-Browning's electronica sounds less contemporary, but is inspiriting; Dal Strutt finishes it off in an ecclesiastical way with two performances in a medieval church for B flat clarinet, baritone (voice) and piano. **Sound Gallery** is like a film soundtrack, albeit a very good one; if it is supposed to evoke emotion, vast panoramic vistas, and nervous cybernetic futures, it does so with aplomb.

The October Meeting Amsterdam improv festival of 1991 deserves more room here, as its contents are probably more attuned to **Rubberneck** readers' ears than the other two compilations. Highlights include the trio of George Lewis, Steve Beresford and Michael Vatcher, who play with great cohesion, exhibiting all the good qualities of improvised music; Beresford's jaunty piano duet with Guus Janssen; Sunny Murray's meeting with Misha Mengelberg and Ab Bears which moves from outside to in; and the large ensemble meeting with Marilyn Crispell, Mark Dresser

and Gerry Hemingway at its epicentre. Worth having. (*Proving Ground Productions/Without Fear Recordings, P.O. Box 7713007, Lakewood, Ohio 44107, USA / Discus, P.O. Box 658, Sheffield S10 3YR, England / Bimhuis distributed by BVHAAST, Prinseneiland 99, 1013 LN Amsterdam*)
Mark Greenaway

Dean/Dunmall/Levin/Rogers/Rudd/Tippett, Bladik (Cuneiform Rune 92 CD)
Paul Dunnall Octet, Desire And Liberation (Slam CD 225 CD)
The Amazing Band, Roar (FMR CD40-L0797 CD)
Here at last is the other half of the Rudd/Dean summit trailed by Bruce Coates in **Rubberneck 24**. He reckoned that the first half "may well turn out to be one of the most important recordings that Dean has yet produced." Much might be said of **Bladik**, which brings Dean and Rudd together with Mujician to produce one of the most invigorating releases of recent years by this generation of players (sorry, Paul and Paul, to call you 'this generation'). The resultant sextet is as much an ensemble as it is six soloists: this is no summit meeting with a pick-up band. And with players such as Dunmall, Rogers, Tippett and the wonderful Tony Levin on board, how could it be? Highlights include the wailing blues that concludes 'Forearmed', and Tippett's and Rudd's brief lament at the close of 'K Ad Lib', a 30-minute improvisation that is proof positive that this generation is still very much with us...

Spirituality in music has had an uneasy passage with both writers and listeners. Music that seeks to convey any real sense of the spiritual is not best served by vapid new age meandering; rather, it must take account of the physicality, the urgency and the contradictions that are as much part of the spiritual quest as are meditation and reflection. Yes managed this well in a rock context with **Tales From Topographic Oceans**; here, Paul Dunmall manages it in jazz with his suite **Desire And Liberation**. This is inspired by the 19th century saint Shri Ramakrishna. Once again, Mujician are at the heart of this enterprise with Dunmall's settings bringing out some phenomenal solos from Tippett and Levin, as well as Simon Picard and Dunmall himself, both on tenor.

Finally, from 1970 we have some raw, prototypical English free jazz from Mal Dean's legendary outfit. Rough, sure, but with some surprising sonorities: Veleroy Spall doubling on violin and accordion, Jim Mullen's harmonica and Robert Wyatt's (?) organ interlude and, of course, Mal Dean's squally trumpet. Uncomfortably but compellingly close-miked, reminding of those WMWM and Symbiosis sessions we used to get on Top Gear with much toing and froing between free-for-all blowing and passages in unison rhythm. My only complaint: at 40 minutes this should have been the LP it sounds like it was meant for. Next time let's have more on a CD, please, FMR.
Chris Atton

Ivo Perelman, Sad Life (Leo Lab CD 027 CD)
Ivo Perelman & Borah Bergman, Geometry (Leo CDLR 248 CD)
Ivo Perelman & Joe Morris, Strings (Leo CDLR 249 CD)
One of the elements which characterises the improvised music scene is the regularity with which musicians issue recordings; a factor which ensures that those of us obsessed with the music will forever live in penury. Although the Brazilian saxophonist Ivo Perelman has only recently become a familiar name, there are already at least 15 CDs to choose from, ranging from his early encounter with Elaine Elias, John Patitucci and others, to **Sad Life** where he is joined by the considerably weightier talents of William Parker and Rashied Ali, who provided such remarkable support for Charles Gayle on **Touchin' On Trane**. While Perelman does not have the profound power of Gayle, he does play with a passionate onslaught which rarely relents. It may lack variety — generally after a rudimentary theme the three combust in a frenzied three-way fulmination — but they avoid any chance of stasis by wonderfully integrated determination to discourse musically on issues raised within the improvisations. Their continuous, clamorous narrative is both engaging and energising.

While Albert Ayler's name is tossed out as an influence, Perelman lacks his emotional reach and Leandro 'Gato' Barbieri seems a more likely

influence. There are times on **Geometry** when Barbieri's superb duet with Dollar Brand, as he was then known, comes to mind on those tracks which use Brazilian folk themes as starting points. Again, Perelman blows every sound possible, his coarse-grained notes twisted into gnarled, knotty shapes to convey a multitude of meanings. But amidst all the bluster, there are moments of great subtlety with Bergman surprisingly restrained much of the time.

Strings provides two big surprises. Firstly, Perelman puts aside his tenor and instead plays cello (pizzicato throughout except for one brief track). Secondly, much of the recording was made by having Joe Morris play acoustic guitar in conjunction with a pre-existing tape of Perelman's improvisations. A peculiar approach, but one which, I must admit, I would not have guessed without the liner notes. The timbral closeness of the two instruments means that they often appear to meld into one, but in these low level exchanges (if they can be called that) Morris does have the more thorough conception of what he wishes to achieve. It is an intriguing recording but one which lacks the dynamic hold of the other two. (*Leo Records, The Cottage, 6 Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA*)

Declan O' Driscoll

Christian Marclay, More Encores
(ReR CM1 CD)
Ground Zero, Consume Red
(ReR GZ2 CD)
Various Artists, Toyko Invasion/Volume 1: Cosmic Kurushi Monsters
(Virgin Tokyo1 2CD)

Things have changed a lot in sampler/turntable music since 1987 (when **More Encores** was first recorded) but Marclay's groundbreaking and aggressive de(con)struction of records by major and minor musical icons (including Louis Armstrong, John Zorn and Maria Callas) is still worth hearing, if only as a fine example of how far a samplist can go using only other people's music as raw material. The main problem with this kind of thing is that it tends to lack real emotional depth or involvement (despite being entertaining and often very funny). Nor does it have the overt anti-consumerist political underpinnings that help make Negativland or plunderphonics worthwhile. However, it is rewarding as evidence of the long-running industrious experimentation of Marclay, and a celebration of the ongoing demystification of music and its media. Moreover, it has also provided a starting point for much of the more mature sampler work that has been produced since. A great place to start.

Otomo Yoshihide's ambitious Sampling Virus Project continues with a strident and disturbing wall of multilayered sound. Mixing turntables, electronics, 'real' instruments and samples of 'real' instruments (in this case the hojok of Korea's Kim Suk Chul), Ground Zero have perhaps created a piece of lasting value; starting with a lone screaming horn, and building over almost an hour to an intensity of Nagasaki-invoking proportions. Far from Marclay's playful iconoclasm, and saying more than most of Japan's current crop of noisemakers, Yoshihide puts both sampler and turntable to more worthy use than simply producing self-referential texts or looping rhythms into a dance mantra, by providing a glimpse of what these 'instruments' can really do.

Japan's musical diversity is well represented on **Cosmic Kurushi Monsters**, issued by Virgin, who have clearly been doing their homework, aided by *The Wire*'s editor Tony Herrington who selected the tracks for this compilation. Most of the usual suspects are here, including Kato Hideki, Space Streakings, Melt Banana, Keiji Haino, Boredoms and Ground Zero. This thoughtful selection of individual tracks creates a coherent whole. However, the collection is mainly guitar orientated, so no Merzbow here. Music veers from the painful lament of Shizuka to the gleeful rock overdrive of Fushitsusha, through neo-punk mayhem from Melt Banana, and the elegiac march of Vajra's 'Snow Falls, Falling Leaves Mean Nothing'. What really strikes home here is not just that most of this music is uncategorisable, but also that we have only just begun to scratch the surface of modern Japanese music. Hopefully, Volume 2 will be as essential. (*ReR Megacorp, 79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG, England*) **R**

Jim Barker

ShortCuts

Reviewed by
Chris Blackford

Robert Wyatt, *Shleep* (Hannibal Records HNCD1418 CD); **Peter Hammill**, *Everyone You Hold* (Fie! FIE9117 CD) Two heroes from the 60s/70s progressive era who continue to ply their distinctive and developing arts with scarcely a glance at the fashion-conscious mainstream.

Shleep is Robert Wyatt's first solo album for several years. Not so much a radical departure from past glories like **Rock**

Robert Wyatt

Bottom (1974) and **Ruth Is Stranger Than Richard** (1975), than a series of new vantage points from which to gaze upon a broadly familiar terrain, haunted by the central presence of that peculiarly poignant high tessitura. Yes, Wyatt's is still one of the most poignant voices in 'rock'. The bouncy opener, 'Heaps Of Sheeps', arranged by Eno, sounds like something from his and John Cale's **Wrong Way Up**, while the touching, if grimy, pastorialism of 'Maryan' echoes Wyatt's splendid vocal performances of the Greaves/Blegvad material on the recent **Songs**. Evan Parker's uncompromised soprano sax makes a fascinating, low-key appearance amid the delightful whimsy of 'The Duchess'; likewise, Eno's off-the-wall synth and Wyatt's rustic fiddle and unschooled trumpet (shades of John Stevens' approach to the cornet) make this piece the most formally challenging. Superstar, Paul Weller, is the surprise guest guitarist accompanying the singer's incisive, word-association, stream-of-consciousness blues-rap, 'Blues In Bob Minor'. Other tracks maintain the high standard, including appearances by Philip Catherine, Annie Whitehead and Phil Manzanera, among others. Poignant (that word again), scalp-tingling and rather magical, too.

Unlike Wyatt, whose solo albums have been relatively few and far between, Peter Hammill has kept up a prolific output since the early 70s. **Everyone You Hold** appears to interweave ideas from earlier 90s projects: the understated, finely detailed songcraft evident on **Fireships** (1990-91) with the brooding, electronic soundscapes of **Sonix** (1994-96). Doubtless, some will perceive in this direction a kind of mellowing. Not so; for while moods may be more restrained, PH's lyrics are as keen as ever, still probing the frailties of Consciousness, still trying to make sense of the evanescence of human existence. 'Everyone You Hold' and 'Personality', sensitively address these concerns, looking to love and self-belief to cement the cracks

Peter Hammill

in Identity. Hugh Banton's organ crescendos beneath staccato vocal phrasing on 'Bubble', recall the ferment of old VdGG epics; while the striking, spartan piano and violin (fine Stuart Gordon) accompaniment with Hammill's deftly paced, elegiac vocals make 'Nothing Comes' one of his most memorable songs. Only 'Phosphorescence' misfires with saccharin strings and soaring, anthemic voices. Otherwise, these multitracked arrangements — ambivalent electric guitars unwinding behind strong melodies — are superbly crafted, never fussily overloaded and rarely driven by strict pulse. It all points to Peter Hammill's maturity as a composer/singer of ambitious rock-based material. (*Hannibal, c/o Rykodisc, 78 Stanley Gardens, London W3 7SZ / Fie! Records, 1 Walcot Gate, Bath BA1 5UG, UK*)

Chris Burn, *Music For Three Rivers* (Victo CD050 CD); **Phil Minton Quartet**, *mouthfull of ecstasy* (Victo CD041 CD) Still better known for his work with British improv group Ensemble, than for his solo improvisations, opportunities for pianist Chris Burn to record the latter have been scarce. 'Storyfall', one of two epics, abounds in fierce, percussive chords, between which he carefully introduces a hesitant, lightly percussive melodic motif. Melodies appear elsewhere, though invariably in splintered fragments. Delicate pitch-bending on the strings yields near-electronic timbres. 'Winter Was Here', the most exciting piece, juxtaposes florid passages with sharp, percussive clusters and dramatic harp-like swirls of colour. While Burn's timbral and textural inventiveness is never less than subtly fascinating, its steely rigour sadly leaves little space for emotional expression.

The title refers not to the trendy chemical substance, but to James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. **mouthfull of ecstasy** was initiated by vocalist Phil Minton and pianist Veryan Weston, later performed with the help of saxophonist John Butcher and percussionist Roger Turner. In the sleevenotes, Butcher says that the point "was not to set the text but to use it as an ingredient of free improvisation." But the very thought of dismembering ('sampling') Joyce's extraordinarily rich and self-contained text, of reducing it to merely an "ingredient" in another activity, is something that still bothers me intensely. Not sacrilegious exactly, but not far off. Minton conveys the earthy physicality and musicality of Joyce's language, though the words are sometimes drowned by the instrumental improvising which, by the way, is packed with thoughtful non-idiomatic activity, occasionally shaped by composed themes. Over time, I've shifted from an initial, vehement disapproval, to being mildly impressed by its audacity and sense of fun. John Corbett's zealous sleeve-notes imply that Joyce would have heartily approved. I'm not convinced. See what *you* think... (*Victo, C.P. 460 Victoriaville, Québec, Canada, G6P 6T3*)

Transient v Resident, *Electrical Shroud* (Discus 7 CD) Back in **Rubberneck 9**, improv keyboardist Pat Thomas describes the academic branch of British electroacoustic music as too straight, too formal. "You've got to be moving with it all the time," he insists. "Electronics are tailor-made for musicians involved in improvised music." After hearing this debut CD by Transient v Resident (Martin Archer v Chris Bywater), you'll know exactly what he means. TvR's influences encompass early electronic music, 70s Krautrock, even recent ambient drones and dancefloor grooves, but **Electrical Shroud** is not feckless, PoMo 'anything goes'. Eight sections are intelligently wrought in the white heat of real-time improvisation, never weighed down by the burden of influences. Improv is the key element here, root of an exciting sense of *movement*, adventure. Not that it's all about rapid fluctuations of mood and tempo. Looped rhythms and drones create phases close to stasis, yet the momentum is onwards towards mutations of densities and dynamics, large-scale and intimate soundscapes, where an insectile scraping of amplified objects inhabits the crevices of towering blocks of sound, where a twist of melody suddenly brightens an austere landscape. Certainly the most absorbing and entertaining electronic music I've heard for a very long time. (*Discus, P.O. Box 658, Sheffield S10 3YR, England*)

Spook, *Spook* (Confront Recordings Front 03 MC) Promising work from this cohesive British quartet whose debut recording reminds me of the new Gushwachs CD, in that both groups generally smooth out the harder features of improv saxophony to explore softer, more expansive gestures, complementing the surrounding electronic drones and delays. No, not ambient-improv; too busy, detailed and, thankfully, too discomfiting for that. Graham Halliwell, Dave Pullin, Richard Sanderson, plus special mention for Kev Hopper whose atmospheric, non-riffy playing restores my faith in the bass guitar as a subtle, versatile instrument for improv. (*Confront Recordings, Flat 2, 14 Lascotts Road, London N22 4JN*)

Bill Bruford/Ralph Towner/ Eddie Gomez, *If Summer Had Its Ghosts* (Discipline Global Mobile DGM9705 CD) New territory for Bill Bruford as he moves from the jazz-fusion of Earthworks

(whose new **Heavenly Bodies** compilation is out on Virgin) to ECM-style chamber jazz, meeting up with two stalwarts of the genre. And, it's a smooth ride for this newly gathered personnel, who seem more eager to please than surprise each other. Bruford trades wild card potential for discreet, airy swing and gentle cymbal and brushwork. Only 'Silent Pool' affronts the polite mainstream manners with its sombre synth hues, furtive arco bass and tense MIDI marimba — hinting at the more ambitious album that was there for the creating. (*Discipline Global Mobile, P.O. Box 1533, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 5ER, England*)

Beñat Achiary/Kent Carter/ David Holmes, *Achiary/Carter/ Holmes* (Vand'oeuvre 9611 CD) A lot of ground is covered by this trio — often within the same piece. French vocalist Achiary is on terrific form; from jazz scat and blues hollaring, to Latin song with folk inflexions, not forgetting improv hysteria. His remarkably supple performances give the recording that extra dramatic sparkle. Carter (bass) and Holmes (percussion) assist, deconstructing idioms with seamless manoeuvres to and from improv abstraction. (*Vand'oeuvre, c/o CCAM, B.P. 126, F 54504 Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy Cedex, France*)

Eugene Chadbourne & John Zorn, *In Memory Of Nikki Arane* (Incus 23 CD); **Henry Kaiser & John Oswald**, *Improvised/ Vancouver* (Incus 26 CD) Improv-noise freaks, listen up! These 1980 duets by Chadbourne and Zorn are right up your tin can alley. Extended techniques on sax, guitar and a whole stack of undisclosed objects and junk. Don't waste time even wondering from what and whom these noises come, just soak up this hour's worth of brutal and bizarre innovation from low-tech heaven.

1996: Kaiser (electric guitar) and Oswald (alto sax) revisit the very room in Vancouver where their 1978 duets for LP **Improvised** (Metalanguage) were conceived. One of them is reissued on this Incus CD — a brittle, twangy, squeeky toy and whining terrier of a piece. In other ways sounding like the US answer to 70s Derek Bailey/Evan Parker duets. The long (38 minutes) recent piece is recognisably from the same duo; Oswald's similarly pressurised, high register voicings, Kaiser's slip-sliding note-bending and boomy sustains. Ruggedly characterful work. (*Incus Records, 14 Downs Road, London E5 8DS*)

Fred Frith Guitar Quartet, *Ayaya Moses* (Ambiances Magnétiques AM051 CD) Debut CD for this current line-up of Frith, René Lussier, Nick Didkovsky and Mark Stewart; compositions by members, plus adaptations of works by Claude Vivier and Olivia Bignardi. A repertoire showcasing the quartet's adroit execution of sharply contrasting moods and dynamics. Strong soloistic flourishes with intricate four-part writing. The title-track by Lussier is a treat — delicate and aggressive by turns. Tops, though, is Frith's 'Freedom Is Your Friends II' — meditative enough to be called 'sacred music'. (*Ambiances Magnétiques, 4580 avenue de Lorimier, Montréal, Québec, Canada H2H 2B5*)

Robert Dick, *Worlds Of If* (Leo CD LR 224 CD); **Robert Dick & Mari Kimura**, *Irrefragable Dreams* (Random Acoustics RA 018 CD) We have Eric Dolphy to thank for bringing the flute into the innovative world of 60s free jazz and, later, American composer/improvisor Robert Dick for further expanding their (he plays many different kinds) sonic capabilities in improvised and other experimental musics. From the eerie, multiphonics of the bass flute on 'If', and the multitracked Oriental timbres of 'Lapis Blues', to the frosty, shakuhachi-like overtones of the alto flute on 'Eye In The Sky', **Worlds Of If** is an authoritative, highly expressive document of contemporary flute playing.

Irrefragable Dreams, his duo with the Japanese, avant-garde classical and improv violinist, Mari Kimura, is evidence of a special dialogue based on close listening and sensitive interplay. They seem temperamentally suited; their improvisations bristle with bold gestures and confident structural method, finely etched microtonal detail and ghostly atmospherics. It appears the pair also had fun dreaming up the 10 recondite track titles — with explanations. I'm already looking forward to their next meeting. (*Leo Records, The Cottage, 6 Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA / Random Acoustics, P.O. Box 301070, D-50780 Köln, Germany*) **R**

Special Issues

Rubberneck 19
Turning The Musical Table:
Improvisation In Britain 1965 - 1990
by Nick Couldry

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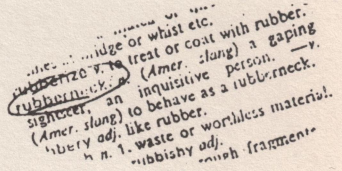
...idge or whist etc.
(rubberize) v. to treat or coat with rubber.
(rubbernecker) n. (Amer. slang) a gaping sightseer, an inquisitive person. —v.
(Amer. slang) to behave as a rubbernecker.
...bery adj. like rubber.
... n. 1. waste or worthless material.
...bbishy adj.
...ough fragment-

...short ideas repeated
Massage the brain...
Robert Ashley, 1979